

COTTAGE PIE

By A. NEIL LYONS

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COTTAGE PIE

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COTTAGE PIE

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BY A. NEIL LYONS

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NOTE

SOME portions of this book were written in Buckinghamshire, about five years ago. The greater part of the book, however, is of more recent origin and was written at the author's present home in Mid-Sussex. Certain words and phrases which appear in some of the sketches are peculiar to the locality in which those sketches were written and have therefore been excluded from other parts of the book.



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COTTAGE PIE



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I

MR. TRACEY

MR. TRACEY was highly recommended into my existence by a common neighbour of ours : an elderly lady, the widow of an officer, who meant well. I mean that the widow meant well ; although, of course, I don't mean that the officer didn't mean—Tut ! you will have to guess what I do mean. My thoughts are never coherent when they dwell upon the subject of Mr. Tracey.

Mr. Tracey wrote me the following letter :

“SIR,—Hearing you are in want of a jobbing gardener, by day, hour, or week, I am highly recommended by Mrs. Turner, of Sloe Cottage. I am inform you have took the little old ruin in Sludge Lane, and if anybody can make anything of such a place I can do it, having known the said place for 56 year, man and boy, before ever it got into such a state of neglect and dispair. I shall be glad to hear from you at your earliest, as there is a lot of work about just now. I was for eighteen

years with Major-General Tinker, late of this parish, which he left to get married, and nine year with his father before him, which built the property, five as under and the rest as head. So such a little old-fashioned place as yours will be child's play to me. I shall be glad to hear if you are ready to avail yourself of my services, likewise Mrs. Turner, as the Rev. Plummer, of your parish, say to me as her hedges was looking wild his last visit.—Your obedient

“WILLIAM TRACEY.

“Blowfield, Sussex. Third house past post office, going up.”

With this explicit direction to guide me, I had no difficulty in finding the residence of Mr. Tracey, the identity of which, indeed, was placed beyond doubt by a neatly painted sign, setting forth the vocations of Mr. Tracey in these terms :

MR. WM. TRACEY.

Jobbing Gardr., Chimney
Sweep, Boot-maker, &c.



Pony and Trap for Hire
French Polishing.

In order to arrive at Mr. Tracey's door, you had to climb up a great many age-worn

steps : for Blowfield is a nice old Sussex town, built in the nice old Sussex manner, on a clay foundation. In climbing Mr. Tracey's steps, I looked upward and beheld at Mr. Tracey's parlour window a grave and speculative countenance, surrounded by well-kept whiskers. After viewing my ascent with an attentive air, as if some miracle attached to it, the grave and speculative countenance came nearer and gradually extended itself and spoke. "You ain't brought it then?" demanded the face.

"Brought what?" I inquired.

"Ain't you the young man from the wheelwright's?" demanded the face.

"I am not," responded your servant.

"Oh," said the face. "Then I suppose you'll be wanting somebody?"

"I want Mr. Tracey," assented your servant.

"I *be* Mr. Tracey," replied the face.
"'Old on a minute."

The face then vanished : but before I had held on very long, it suddenly reappeared in the street below me, and I saw that it was attached to six-foot-two of portliness, attired in black. "Step down here," said Mr.

Tracey ; “ we don’t reckon to use our front door on week days.”

I stepped down, and having obeyed an imperative command to “ tie that dog up,” I followed Mr. Tracey into a woodshed, where I respectfully explained my business. Mr. Tracey, spreading a large hand over the surface of his spotless black waistcoat, respectfully examined me from hat to toe.

“ So *you* be the party what has took the old place in Sludge Lane ? ” inquired Mr. Tracey : and upon my assenting to this assumption, he coughed in a manner which said more clearly than words that I had the appearance of such a party.

“ Me and my son will meet you there at nine o’clock to-morrow morning,” announced Mr. Tracey.

“ Your son ! ” I echoed.

“ Yes,” said Mr. Tracey firmly, “ my son. We always go out together : ninepence a hour the two.”

I wanted to tell Mr. Tracey that I had not bargained for a son : that I could not afford a son. But Mr. Tracey awed me. His manner was suave : but at the same time grand and distant : and there was an air of conscious, whiskered worth about him, as he

stood before me, idly toying with a massive "albert" watch-chain, which froze the contemplated impertinence upon my lips. It was difficult to realise that this dignified gentleman with the speculative manner could be tempted by gold to traffic with a dirty spade. . . . When the thought became too awful, I stole away.

Mr. Tracey appeared next morning at the appointed spot, his son with him. The latter I perceived (not without a secret twinge of regret) was just a normal youth in corduroy and freckles. But Mr. Tracey himself appeared to greater advantage than ever, not, it is true, in the sober habit of yesterday, but in a suit of Melton cord, which, while transforming him from a wealthy banker into a county Justice, diminished none of his importance.

It had been my intention to explain to Mr. Tracey my wishes respecting the work which he had undertaken to perform. But Mr. Tracey relieved me of this duty. "We need not enter into no explanations," said Mr. Tracey. "I see exactly what is wanted yere. It want a little ole-fashioned, antikew sort o' place makin' yere."

"I thought——"

"No good thinkin' anything yet awhile," asserted Mr. Tracey. "We got to *find* the blessed garden first."

With these words, Mr. Tracey seized a dreadful-looking implement and lunged at a plum tree. I took the liberty of arresting his arm. "I don't want any trees cut down," I said.

"No trees cut down?" repeated Mr. Tracey. "Come, come, sir! Why, Major-General Tinker, when 'e be a-makin' of his Eyetalian garden, 'e cut down a matter of *forty* trees!"

Even this distinguished precedent failed to alter my determination. I am firm on the subject of trees, and I was able to induce Mr. Tracey to realise that fact. It was my only victory. Henceforward, Mr. Tracey and General Tinker had it all their own way.

Mr. Tracey explained that the garden would require a rose-walk. Major-General Tinker always said that no garden was complete without a rose-walk. "We shall want a few shillingsworth of wood for that," said Mr. Tracey: "I suppose I can order it?"

A few days later, two large waggons arrived in Sludge Lane, containing logs of

wood and ten-foot poles, and the forester-in-charge respectfully presented me with a bill for eight-pounds-something.

“What is this?” I said to Mr. Tracey.

“Oh,” responded Mr. Tracey, “it’s all right. This be the few poles an’ that what I ordered for your rose-walk.”

“Then this,” I said with bitterness, “is your idea of a few shillings?” and I showed Mr. Tracey the little bill.

“Why, God bless you, sir,” said Mr. Tracey, with mild amusement, “the wood what we used for General Tinker’s rose-walk, that cost the General nigh on ninety pound!”

Mr. Tracey also ordered on my behalf a few shillingworth of broken bricks with which to make a path. When I suggested that cinders would perhaps be cheaper, Mr. Tracey nearly swooned. “I was under the himpression, sir,” said Mr. Tracey, “that what we was to make of this was a little, old-fashioned, antikew sort o’ place. *Cinders!*”

Mr. Tracey has great faith in the value of decayed iron. Major-General Tinker, in setting out his terrace and topiary avenue, unearthed an old iron cauldron, valued by Mr. Tracey at “a ’undred pound, or maybe

two." Mr. Tracey is modestly conscious of his own shortcomings as a judge of old iron ; but he believes that amongst the other advantages conferred upon me by what he calls "college schooling" is the gift of identifying the real Early English thing in hardware at a glance. He therefore made a large collection of paralytic kettles and broken clock-weights, of which a rich seam existed on the property ; and of these he soon composed a large rick, the additions to which I was invited to examine every morning with a view to ear-marking any article which might be worth a hundred pound or two.

Mr. Tracey has long since completed the process of finding the garden ; but, in the meantime, he has lost it again : having dug in every visible object three times. The process of making a proper, old-fashioned, antikew little place of it has already endured for five months ; and Mr. Tracey is utterly unable to form an estimate as to the probable duration of the rest of the treatment. "General Tinker's garden took seven year to make," Mr. Tracey informs me, "and properly speaking, if you can unnerstand my meaning, it wasn't really *finished* until seven year arter that."

Myself, I am tired, as well as cold, having been forced, in Mr. Tracey's interest, to pawn all but the statutory minimum of my apparel ; but Mr. Tracey is getting fresher every day, and seconded by his son he digs up and digs in with unabated zest.

Only this morning he brought me an early British salmon-tin (excavated from the neighbourhood of a quince tree) together with a proposition :

“ Do you know what I bin thinking, sir ? ” he said. “ I bin thinking as we shall have to dig a little ornamental lake. General Tinker he often say to me that a lake was the principal thing in a garden. It would look proper and antikew, a little lake at the end there. You could kip eels in it, too.”

I am going to put Mr. Tracey up to auction. But, in the meantime, could I lend or let him ? He is highly recommended.

II

CATHERINE WHEELS

THE worst of my lane in spring-time is that the tramps infest it so. "Tramp" is a technical term employed by agriculturists and Retired Gentry to describe all strangers below the rank of a sewing-machine tout.

Being by nature a local and, indeed, domestic patriot, I naturally share the local antipathy to these persons—insubordinate, unhygienic persons—who sleep under hedges, play nap under hedges, swear, steal water out of people's ponds, and omit to touch their caps.

They take all sorts of liberties, these persons. One vagrom fellow came lately to my door and besought the loan of a screw-driver. Another demanded salt. *Salt!* I swear it. As if one was a sort of relieving officer, don't you know. Not to mention their "Dread-noughts" which one has to pay for.

This trickster possessed a liquorish leer, and, perhaps, was not lawfully wedded to his wife. So to spite him I spoke thus :

"Open the kitchen door (wipe your boots,

please), and on the second shelf of the dresser you will see a red jar. Open it and you'll find two packets; the white one contains salt. Take what you want, and close the packet carefully and put it back in the jar and shut——"

But before I could finish, the fellow took to his heels. Living in a Christian country, he supposed me to be mad. Thus I spited him.

So recently as this morning another of these creatures came snivelling round. This was a female creature, and she had the impudence to ask for a flower.

I stared at her.

She was juvenile and her manners were not nice: nor was she perfectly combed. She wore a corporeal garment of vivid pink, and her legs were clad in faded yellow stockings. She grinned at me familiarly.

I still stared at her.

But she kept her nerve. She spoke:

"Come on, young man; give us a flower."

"Little girl," I said, "what is your name?"

"Sis," replied the little girl.

"And what do you say," I demanded, suddenly recollecting the formula.

"Please, I *don't* think," responded Sis, protruding her tongue.

I offered her, as it were, a Christian smile and told her she was rude. "Where do you come from?" I inquired.

"Along o' the pictures," answered Sis.

"What pictures?" I demanded.

"The hanimated pictures," said Sis; "MacGuffky's. I'm a show girl."

"You are," I cordially assented. "Which flowers do you want?"

"They yaller uns," said Sis.

To rid myself of this disreputable visitor, I gathered a bunch of leopard's bane—in point of fact, it pays to cut such stuff—and permitted her to take them.

"Gawd-love-ye-catherine-wheels," cried the visitor, quite unexpectedly, and all in one breath. With which words she flung herself earthward and performed a series of rapid and shameless somersaults all along the lane in front of my abode.

The dress was pink, and the stockings were of faded yellow; but the catherine wheels were—the catherine wheels were—they, in fact, defied my feeble powers of terminology. They introduced some wholly new and indescribable effects.

When the wheels were thoroughly exhausted, they unwound themselves and sat up. The wheelwright, having collected her doricums, held out a hand. "So long, mate," she said: "it's time I got back to the van. I got my ole man's dinner to git ready."

"You are married, then?" I blandly inquired.

"Me?" cried Sis. "Why, I ain't been courtin' 'ardly a month. I ain't only twelve year old. You got a well be'ind there, ain't you?"

"Of course, your looks and your behaviour," I admitted, "are not those of a married woman. Who is your old man?"

"Father! 'E's blind o' one eye and 'is right arm don't act, through bein' a lion-tamer when 'e was little. He takes the money now along o' the pictures and speaks the lectures. Got any tobaccer for 'im?"

I found some damaged Navy Cut.

Sis immediately began to revolve again. This was evidently her substitute for thank you.

The first spin of gratitude had, however, exhausted most of Sis's breath, and the fresh display ended more quickly.

Having swept back her tresses, the unorthodox arrangement of which was now more marked than ever, she reverted to the subject of my well. "'Ave it got a 'andil to wind up?" demanded Sis.

I admitted that it had.

"'Tis like me auntie's well, what live in Lincolnshire," explained Sis. "We got a aunt what lives in a 'ouse."

I expressed surprise at learning of this phenomenon.

"They got their own ingin and swings," explained my visitor. "And they 'ires it out, so as to retire on their means. They lived in a 'ouse for a *long* time now. That's got a well, the same as yourn. And two rooms up top. That's got a garden, wi' yaller flowers the same as this. They got a woodshed and a apple-lorft and a place where my auntie bile the bed-sheets. They got bees in their garden, and they don't sting nobody, not without you put your 'and in.

"Auntie, she says as *I* shall live in a 'ouse one day, if I'm a good gal and works 'ard. I git a lot o' pennies sometimes for the catherine wheels. I shall 'ave a well outside my 'ouse; and a 'andil, so's to wind it up."

Seeing that a properly constituted well has

got to be built with bricks, and seeing that even inferior bricks cost a penny each, one couldn't help wondering, don't you know, how often the catherine wheel would have to revolve before that well held water. Still, at the same time—as I ventured to suggest to her—if half a dozen bricks were any use to begin with, why——

“Gawd-love-ye: catherine wheels!” cried the wheelwright, putting the sixpence between her teeth and revolving frantically.

“I—I shall 'ave a sink in *my* 'ouse,” she resumed a little later, breathing with difficulty. “And a copper to bile the bed-sheets in. And two rooms on top, with steps to go up to them.

“I shall 'ave a locker on the wall, with 'am inside of it and a bottle of whiskey for my old man, and a *glass* to drink it out of, so as to cheer him up because 'e be blind o' one eye.

“I shall 'ave a carpet on the floor and gramophone in the winder, same as you see in the pubs.

“I shall 'ave a lid to my well, the same as what you've got, and a 'andil, so's to wind it up and wind it down.”

“Houp la! Ovah!”

The catherine wheel began again.

III

A NATURALIST

"I SHALL be late for me tea agin," said Mr. Green. "Not that *moi* tea matter. I got a lot o' work to do this evenin'—wroitin' out accounts an' that. Not that *moi* work matter to anybody."

"You are a Pessimist, Mr. Green," I observed.

"No," said Mr. Green; "a Plumber."

"You look at the sad side of things," I explained; "you undervalue your own happiness."

"Look what a miserable, muddy world it is," responded Mr. Green. "Look how people put on you. That don't 'arf.'old some water, this blessed well. I never reckoned on all this water when I put the job at seven shillin'."

"Have you heard the nightingale yet, Mr. Green?" I inquired hastily.

"That I 'ave," said Mr. Green. "'Eard the blighter three week agoo."

"You *were* in luck!" I exclaimed admiringly. "Sure it was the nightingale?"

“That I be,” asserted Mr. Green. “’Im what say ‘Pewee! Pewee!’ all the bloody night.”

I dissembled my surprise. “Most people,” I pointed out, “speak well of the nightingale.”

“Ugly great beast,” said Mr. Green—“flap-pin’ ’is white wings were ’e beant wanted. ‘Pewee! *Pew-ee!* *Pe-wee!*’ ’e say, same’s if anybody was took ill. Meself, I never did ownerstand why so much fuss be made about ’im.”

“The note, or sound, which you describe,” I said, “is not altogether characteristic of the nightingale. He does not always imitate the plover.”

“That *be* the plover,” stated Mr. Green, greatly to my surprise. “Nightingale, plover, or pewee, ’tis one and the same bird. They put it in the story books where a woman are got the nightingale’s sweet voice. ’Tis true enough, I will allow, though where the sweetness of it come in I never *did* see. Screechin’ passel o’ monkeys——”

“It is curious,” I reflected, “that different men should derive such different emotions from the same experiences.”

“Say it slower, sir,” suggested Mr. Green.

“Many people like the nightingale better than any other bird,” I said.

“They’re the sort,” responded Mr. Green, “as like women.”

“Don’t you like women ? ” I inquired.

“Screechin’ passel o’ monkeys,” repeated Mr. Green.

“Some men like the sound of women’s voices,” I submitted.

“They be the sort,” said Mr. Green, “as would like the screechin’ of a nightingale.”

“Ah well,” I mused, “it is a question of temperament, I suppose.”

“Of what ? ” said Mr. Green.

“Temperament,” I repeated.

“I donno narthin’ about temper meant,” quoth Mr. Green. “Temper meant or not, they be for ever screechin’.”

“Which—the nightingales ? ”

“Or the women,” said Mr. Green. “’Tis the same thing. A nightingale aren’t got narthin’ better to do, on’y cry out ‘Pewee—Pe-wee’ all the blessed night, and a woman aren’t got narthin’ better to do on’y carry on the same infernal tune.”

“But nightingales sing pleasantly at times.”

“Never to moi ’earin’,” said Mr. Green.

“’Tis a scattle-tongued bird.”

"Beauty," I murmured, "is in the eye of the beholder; and music, I suppose, is——"

"Music!" echoed Mr. Green. "D'ye call *that* music?"

"Which?"

"The screechin' of women," said Mr. Green; "or nightingales. 'Tis the same thing. They be both for ever 'ollerin'. Whether you 'it 'em or whether you don't."

"But people don't hit nightingales," I objected.

"Only for want o' the chanst," responded Mr. Green. "'Oo wouldn't 'it a plaguesome creeter same's that be? 'Pe-wee! Pew-ee!' 'e cry out all the bloody night. Puts a man in mind of 'is wife."

"Do you believe in hitting wives?" I suggested, with an air of pleasantry.

"No doubt I should," assented Mr. Green, "on'y I aren't possessed of no sich thing—on'y a old aunt. *She* be nightingale enough for me.

"'Pewee!' she says: 'Pe-wee! *Pew-ee!*' all the jolly day, and 'arf the bloody night. 'Pewee! Pe-wee! *Pe-wee!*'—jus' the same as a ugly ole nightingale."

IV

MR. BURPEE

A SHABBY little gentleman came pattering along the dusty lane. He was a stout little gentleman, with a very big head, on which he wore an extremely small black hat.

This little gentleman, who was followed by a youthful attendant in corduroys, knocked at the door of a wayside cabin, which happened to be occupied by myself.

He asked me if I lived there. I replied, without equivocation, that I did.

"Boy," cried the gentleman, "bring it inside the gate here and put it down."

My visitor's attendant, saluting briskly, then walked in and deposited at my feet a large wooden box, constructed of polished walnut wood, and containing (to judge from the difficulty with which the porter handled it) some extremely weighty substance.

"My card, sir," said the stout gentleman, offering me a printed certificate of his identity. I learned from this document that my visitor's name was Burpee.

"I have the honour, sir," he said, "to be

the Mid-Sussex representative of Messrs. Wolff and Co., London."

I nodded.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Burpee.

I nodded again.

"Yes, sir," repeated Mr. Burpee.

I waited for Mr. Burpee to say more, but waited in vain. It became evident that the next move was mine. "Is this for me?" I accordingly inquired, tapping the polished walnut-wood box with the toe of my shoe.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Burpee, stooping down and gently rubbing the point of contact with a corner of his jacket.

I noticed, when he stood up again, that his face was red and damp: that there was dust in his hair and on his lips.

"You have walked far?" I inquired.

"From Blowfield Station—five and a half miles," he replied. "Of course," he added, "I've had a rest or two on the way."

"Of course," I assented. I looked at the box of polished walnut wood and smiled—a little sadly.

"With A. Wolff and Co.'s compliments," said Mr. Burpee, looking from the box to me.

"A cup of tea?" I said, raising an interrogative eyebrow.

“That would be extremely kind of you,” said Mr. Burpee, seating himself gently on the walnut-wood box. “Allow me, sir,” he added with a prodigious sniff, “to congratulate you upon the size and perfume of your *Nicotina affinis*.”

“What will the boy drink?” I demanded, with a bow.

The boy spoke for himself. “Don’t you trouble naarthun to make no tea for *me*, sir,” he said. “A glass of ale will do for me.”

A little later I resumed my dialogue with Mr. Burpee. “It is a pity,” I said, indicating the walnut-wood box again, “that you’ve had to carry it so far. I’m afraid you will have to carry it farther.”

Mr. Burpee sighed gently as he decanted a small quantity of tea into his saucer. “You know best, sir,” he said. “But Messrs. Wolff and Co. supplied me with very strong hopes.”

“Had you been what I first imagined you to be,” I continued, “we might perhaps have . . . Do you know what I thought? When you first came round the bend and before the boy appeared I felt sure that you tuned pianos. I hope that you won’t be offended. I judged by the dust on your boots.”

"No," said Mr. Burpee, "you don't offend me in the least. You rather flatter me. I would give much to be in the musical line—to travel, as it were, with flutes."

"Well," I said, again referring to the walnut-wood case, "you do the next best thing."

Mr. Burpee looked a little puzzled. Presently the expression of doubt departed from him and he nearly smiled. "I do believe," he said, "that we have been at cross-purposes all this time. This here is not a gramophone!"

"Isn't it!" I exclaimed.

"No," said Mr. Burpee. "This here is a sewing-machine. Under these circumstances, sir, perhaps Messrs. Wolff were not mistaken in holding out the hopes which——"

I shook my head. "My simple needs," I was forced to assure him, "are fully gratified by one small card of patent buttons and a gimlet."

"Messrs. Wolff," he answered, "have empowered me to leave it here for one month with their compliments. You don't take any risk, you know."

"Except," I suggested, again eyeing the walnut-wood case, "that it is so much the kind of thing which one is apt to fall over."

"That," he replied, "is *our* risk. We never claim for reasonable damages." He blew on his saucer thoughtfully.

"Well," I said, "It's a pity you've had to come so far for nothing."

"Not at all," he replied; "though I dare say Messrs. Wolff will be disappointed. You see, they got you out of a good directory—a very genteel directory."

"Never mind about Messrs. Wolff," I replied. "They will recover. The invigorating air of Houndsditch . . ."

He nearly smiled again.

"I only hope that *you* aren't disappointed," I added awkwardly. I liked his mouth and his little black hat.

"Not at all, sir," answered Mr. Burpee. "I shall leave this machine on somebody's step some day. It is a queer sort of pastoral drama, sir, this in which I play."

"What do you know about the pastoral drama?" The impertinence bolted from my thoughts to my tongue.

"I have read the play in which Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard Seed are figured, sir."

"Oh," I murmured, and looked at the walnut-wood box.

"Before I took to shedding lockstitch

machines on people's doorsteps," pursued Mr. Burpee, "I used to peddle dreams."

"You did *what*?" I exclaimed.

"Sold *dreams*, sir. Are you acquainted with the Poet Beddoes?"

I shook my head.

Mr. Burpee got up from the box and carefully deposited his cup and saucer on a gatepost. "I have the honour to be informed by Messrs. Wolff that you are an author, sir?" he said.

I nodded.

"Well, sir," continued Mr. Burpee, "I take it that in some sort of manner of degree you too are a pedlar of dreams. The Poet Beddoes wrote a poem called 'Dream Pedlary.' Boy, pick up that box. Steady, now—mind the varnish!"

"Won't you take another cup of tea?" I interposed.

"For several years, sir," said Mr. Burpee, ignoring my question, "I walked the lanes with a very similar box to this, which, however, contained my stock of dreams: the author of 'Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard Seed,' in eight octavo volumes, royal, sir."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Burpee.

“*Oh!*” I said again.

“Yes, sir,” repeated Mr. Burpee. “But the people who took my dreams, sir, offered me beer and bacon in barter, sir. I considered the exchange unsatisfactory. The sewing-machine has this great advantage over poetry, sir : you don’t particularly care who handles it, sir, so long as his payments are punctual and satisfactory.”

By this time Mr. Burpee had walked through my gate and closed it behind him.

He now turned round and rested his elbow on the gate. “I will *give* you a line or two of Beddoes in exchange for the tea, sir,” he said.

Then, taking off his little round hat, and gazing shyly into the crown of it, Mr. Burpee spoke as follows :

“If there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell;
Some a light sigh,
That shakes from Life’s fresh crown
Only a rose-leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell,
Merry and sad to tell,
And the crier rung the bell,
What would you buy?”

“Thank you, Mr. Burpee,” I said.

He looked at me over his hat-brim. "You will like the next verse," he said. "I will give you the next verse too ; just that one."

He looked into his hat again and began :

"A cottage lone and still,
With bowers nigh,
Shadowy, my woes to still,
Until I die.
Such pearl from Life's fresh crown,
Fain would I shake me down.
Were dreams to have at will,
This would best heal my ill,
This would I buy."

He put on his little hat and offered me an awkward little bow, and sighed and turned away.

"Mr. Burpee, Mr. Burpee!" I called out. "Come back, Mr. Burpee. I want to buy that sewing-machine."

He stopped and looked back at me and spoke.

"I have sold you a dream, sir," he said. "Be content." And with those words walked on.

V

THE FOOL'S GARDEN

“HE weer a *Powit*, mestur. That be the point an’ peth on it. Oi bin a dull-thowted creature all moi days, an’ they toimes oi weer stell in moi maidenhood, wi’ a maiden’s mumpses. He weer a *Powit*, as made songs in the darkness, though crookid-legged an’ arl, an’ much praised be the vicar. He weer a *Powit*, an’ oi could not ’oold ’is fancy.

“Nut, mind yew, but what he come back to me at finish. Pray, yes ! He come back to me at finish. He come ’oom a month whilst the end, looking glad in the sun-close ; though poorly be roights an’ shrunked, wi’ arl the scorn wrung out of ’im, an’ spaniel-dog eyes, like when he be a le’l buy an’ the other buys made mock to ’is leg. An’ ’e say to me : ‘Meggie, Meggie ! Mek moi bed up !’

“An wi’ that, he walk into this room yare, an’ set him down on thet cheer there, same’s ef he be roighteously got back from a yairff day’s warrk ; thoo et weer foive yeer sence ever oi set eyes on ’im. ‘Lock the dower,’

says 'e, when 'e be seated ; ' lock the dower !
Oi'll be proivut an' serene in moi own 'eowse,'
'e say.

" An' wi' that, oi knowed as the wroitin'-wummun fr'm Lunnon 'ud failed to 'oold 'is fancy likewise.

" So 'e set theer, drowsy loike an' soilent, an' oi make up 'is bed, an' oi carry 'im to ut. An' 'e lay theer to the end, shrunken an' poorly an' drowsy-loike, though never tankerous. But oi hed took away the lavendar-sprays from the cupboard, an' the cage-finch what lived boi the winder, becos oi knowed of old as et was they-loike fancies what often *made* 'im tankerous. Nor 'e did not ask to see our le'l buy, 'is son, as set below an' wondered, dressed up in 'is father's weddin' soot what oi hed cut down for 'im in the winter.

"An' the wroitin'-wummun from Lunnon, she never come noigh, with 'er blewses an' selks an' cock-robin 'ats, the sinful harlot. Because me an' moi le'l buy we waited an' waited for her ; an' ef she had come, boi Gard, moi buy he should 'a' spet upon her wi' his le'l mouth an' struck her with his le'l fists, boi Gard, he should !

" Moi man knowed nowt o' this, for 'e

lay above stairs, so poorly an' shrunken. That seem, yew moight say, as ef he knowed nowt of nothink. That seem as ef he never *wanted* to know out, any more. Sometimes that would 'pear, from the look of 'im, as ef he lay an' thought o' things—for he be a Powit, mester; and his moind weer marvelled at be the vicar—sometimes, oi say, he would 'pear to lay an' thenk o' things; sometimes he would 'pear to lay an' drowse, tho' his eyes was open an' clear. Nor he weer never what yew moight carl properly tankerous to the end. When he wanted out, he would thump upon the flewer-boards wi' a chair as stood be his bedside; an' when he wanted nout, he would lay still. An' so it went along from day to day—'im never bein' properly tankerous, but never arstin' for to see our le'l lahd, nor never tellin' o' the past nor of 'is thoughts, nor speakin' 'ardly, save to airst for food or physic. Nor 'e didn't airst for much o' neether, an' Gard knows theer weer little in the 'eouse for 'im to airst for.

“Becos the season were not fair set in for work in the fields an' that, an' the lady what I odd-jobbed for had hired her cottage to some fowks from Lunnon, as had browt

their sarvant wi' them : an' moi man bein' so poorly, oi couldn't leave the place for long. An' there was nothink from the parish *then*—I draw moi fower shillin' reg'lar now—because I was not widdowed, an' oi did not say owt during they foive years 'e weer away for fear as they should punish 'im—'e 'avin' a crooked leg.

“ So when moi man come 'oom at lairst, it weer to a lean cupboard. 'E browt not a 'appenny 'isself ; an', poor though we was, I thanked Gard for the marcy. For, save the clothes what 'e wore, moi man 'e come 'oom to me as 'e come to 'is own dead mother—poorly an' shrunken an' naked.

“ An' so the days went on, 'im layin' soilent-loike an' drowsy on 'is bed above stairs : me below, makin' what shift oi could be washin' an' manglin' an' the loike, an' waitin' ready, lest 'e should thump the fletcher an' me not yare. An' at last—an hour befower the end—he carls for me boi name.

“ An' when I goes into the chamber, I could see as 'e be unusual broight about the eyes. An' 'e look at me shoi, loike when 'e was le'l, and 'e airst me would oi lay beside 'im on the bed, an' 'old 'is 'ead between moi airms. An' oi done as 'e airst me. And 'e say

to me : ' Talk about yewr gairden, Meggie, an' the birds, an' the thengs in the woods.'

" So oi done as 'e airst me, tho' feelin' very awkwid : for oi knowed as in the oold days sich talk as thet would always make 'im tankerous, 'e bein' a Powit, an' 'avin' a marvellous moind as a set-off to the leg. Still, oi make shift to tell 'im o' the lady-smock in Vicarage Medder ; an' the 'awthorns as be peepin', an' the thrush's egg as our le'l lahd 'ad f'und, an' 'ow the yellowchicks was everywhere, an' the candytuft be bloomin' in a bed beneath 'is winder.

"An' 'e say to me : ' You be allus fond o' gairdens an' woods an' sich, beant yew, ole Meggie ? ' And oi admitted it, that bein' the truth. ' Well,' say he, ' oi beant.'

" That was true, too ; an' on'y roight an' nat'ral, as oi toold 'im, 'e bein' a Powit an' man o' moind. An' 'e lairf in 'is stomach : an' e' say to me, ' Meggie,' 'e say, ' oi will give yew a motto about gairdens, what oi thowt of up yare ; oi want yew to remamber it,' 'e say, ' for it is the best motto oi ever made, an' it is the truth about moi gairden,' says 'e : ' which the motto is this : "*The fool's gairden is a wilderness o' wisdom.*" That is the motto,' says 'e. ' Keep on sayin'

it to yeself,' says 'e, 'so's you'll know it in about twanty minutes' toime, when oi beant 'ere to tell yew,' 'e say.

" Oi bin sayin' it to meself, mester, for sex yare now ; an' it down't seem to carry no more meanin' wi' it nowadays than when moi man fust spoke it. But a man's moind that beant never at its best when 'e be doi-in'.

" An' yet 'e went on to talk quite rational : tellin' me not to wear no weeds nor that, an' to sell the bewks downstairs—the bewks you was airstin' after, mester—an' not to take less nor twenty p'und for 'em. Oi wouldn't take a 'undred !

" An' oi closed 'is eyes befower the twanty mennits. An' oi laid 'im out—so poorly an' shrunken 'e was—an' oi shrouded 'im. An' me an' moi le'l buy, we went a-foot to bury 'im. An' the wroitin'-wummun as killed 'im, she never come noigh 'is grave.

" But a gentlem come from Lunnon to take 'is bewks for a debt. So oi soold the oold cherrywood dresser as was moi granfer's mother's, an' oi soold moi le'l buy's bed. 'E lay warmer alung of me, with 'is 'ead jest so atween moi airms, as moi man's hed useter be.

.

“ Lat me mek yew another brew o’ tea ?
Now, do, mester ! *Oi* shairn’t chairge yew
no extra. *Moi* son, as work at the wood-
turnin’, ’e’ve took the key o’ *moi* cupboard
in ’is pocked. Else *oi* would ask yew taste
moi rhubarb woine. Pray ! *Oi* could ’a’
supped a drop mese’f.

“ ’Ow *oi* fust come to be sweet-’airts wi’
moi man *oi* couldn’t zackly say : though it
begun, in a manner o’ speakin’, when we was
so ’oigh. Very loikely, it was the both on us
bein’ love-childs what drawed us together ;
bein’ love-childs an’ looked down on be the
puer fowk o’ the village. That an’ ’is poor
leg.

“ *Moi* son was born in wedlock, *oi* thenk
Gard ! ’Twas on’y be three weeks, *oi* will
admit ; but born in wedlock ’e was, wi’ the
vicar’s own name to the stiffcut. There’s no
woman in the village as can say mower for
’er son ; an’ there’s many as must say less—
be a fortnight.

“ It is a cruel fate to be a love-child.
’Tis ’ard an’ weariful enough for them as is
strong an’ can ’it back. But it weer in
specially a plague to *moi* poor le’l man,

wi' 'is crooked leg an' white face an' starin' eyes, wi' the spaniel-dog look what the buys made game of.

"An' so I felt a sorter traction to 'im. An' many's the toime I stood in the school-yaird wi' me sleeves turned back, an' 'ad a stan'-up foight wi' some o' they bullyin' louts as pestered 'im. An' one o' them was Jim Pooley, over to Petterling Mill there, what 'as bin moi best friend ever since, an' what was a good friend to moi le'l man, loikewise, when oi 'ad finished threshin' 'im.

"So in the schooldays me an' moi man we be always together : an' we got the name o' bein' sweet-'airts even then, though for no reason that I could see, 'cept yew can count 'im pullin' moi 'air about when tankerous.

"An' later on, when schooldays be over, we was still about together. For what with 'is crooked leg an' that, an' 'im bein' fond o' study an' bewks, there was none o' the lads as would take up wi' 'im, nor 'e wi' them, for that matter, save Jim Pooley, as be gen'ly poloite for the reason oi 'ave tole yew. So moi le'l man an' oi we would walk out together most of the evenin's, 'im complainin' to me about the wood-turnin', an' 'ow 'e

'ated it, an' 'ow 'e 'ad a moind to be a Powit, the same as Shakespeare, an' sell bewks. And o' Sundays, in the summer, 'e would walk me over the 'ills there to Waller's Oak, as is named after a gentleman as lived in these pairts an' wrote powitry.

"And 'e would read to me outer Waller's book, as was give 'im to school for a proize. An' oi couldn't make much of it; on'y moi le'l man was 'appy a-settin' under the oak there wi' his bewk; and oi weer 'appy too, for it is a foine oold oak, all twisted an' twirly, loike smoke when it comes up solemn from a dyin' foire, an' there weer a pond beside of it, an' water-buttercups as blew there, white an' bashful. An' still we 'ad the name for bein' sweet-'airts, an' still oi couldn't see for whoi!

"Then come the Whitsun Fair down be Petterling, wi' kiss-in-the-ring come nightful. An' Jim Pooley 'e kisses me. An' moi le'l man, as be 'oldin' 'ands wi' me, 'e come oover wi' a sudden whoiteness, an' 'e stroike Jim Pooley in the mouth. An' Jimmie 'e wiped 'is mouth an' walked away. An' oi weer surry for Jim, seein' that I knowed 'im to be soft about me, which oi weer held to be a comely maiden, having had a Oirish sailor

for my father, as ran away before I come, so that moi hair be black, as you see, though glossier then, wi' blue eyes an' a fresh skin. An' oi made to foller Jimmie for to comfort 'im, on'y moi le'l fellar, 'e 'eld moi airm. ' 'Tis me or 'im ! ' 'e say. An' there weer the spaniel-dog look in 'is eyes.

" So we left the fair-ground, an' come 'ome together : through the church-yaird an' oover the 'ills, wi' on'y the moon to see. An' we 'eer the nightjar whirrin', an' we smell the medda-tufties. An' we be sweet-'airts then.

" So in course o' toime moi mother come to know. An' mother see the vicar, an' the vicar spoke to 'im, an' we was married. Moi buy weer born in wedlock. He weer born o' a May-Day ; so that the cuckoo be his bird.

" An' all weer 'appy for a month or two, 'cept for 'im being tankerous about the wood-turning. An' me, bein' a wisp of a maiden, wi' a maiden's mumpses, though the mother of a buy, must drive 'im selly wi' moi talk o' baby, an' moi garden, an' the pigeons what moi uncle give me, an' settin' in the woods o' noight.

" There's never a wummun in these pairs will so much as crorst the shadder of a wood after sunclose. But moi father, as run away

before I come, he weer an Oirish sailor-man, an' there be gipsy blood in Oirland, people say ; an' so oi loves the moon, as lays a grave-sheet oover thengs, an' the sweaty, dark woods, as make you fritted, an' the stars, as spoi upon yew from the cracks above.

“ So when moi man went out o' noights, oi would go into the wood behoind our cottage here whoilst he come back. Sometimes I would walk roight through them, an' come out to a hole in the boughs, which fowks have nicknamed 'The Edge o' the World,' an' there oi would sit an' look down at the fields in the valley below, and think about moi man, an' the le'l baby, an' the sailors at sea, an' the owls in their nasts, an' moi father, as weer an Oirishman, an' run away afore oi come.

“ Then when he come to know what oi'd been after he would be tankerous an' sweer at me. An' though oi hed the sense to see as oi had oughter drop it, oi didn't somehow seem to hev the nature. An' when the First o' May come round again, oi took my le'l baby, as weer one year oold, an' oi popped 'im in a shawl, an' took 'im to the moonlight at our cottage door to count the apple-blossoms on our wall-tree, odd or even, for

'is fortune. An' moi man came 'ome, an' cuffed me for a fool.

"That weer when the wroitin' toimes 'ad started. 'E showed some wroitin' to the vicar, what 'e hed done : an' the vicar marvelled. An' 'e wrote to some genelmen in Lunnon, an' they sent a sovereign to moi man, an' printed what he wrote. An' Mr. Bellingham, of the 'Observer' at Petterling, he give moi man a pund a week to roide round in a pony-trap an' wroite things reg'lar. An' fowks begun to talk about him, an' once or twice 'e come 'ome drunk, which was a easy thing with him on account of the weakness in his leg.

"Then the genelmen from Lunnon, they send him mower money, and he wroite more powems. An' gentlefolk begins for to stop at the cottage door, and airsk to speak with him. And the seven young ladies at the vicarage, they have him up to tea.

"An' then the vicar, he give him the money to go an' get it all made up into a greny-covered bewk, loike a washin' bewk, on'y slimmer.

"The gentlefowk begun to come round more'n ever then. And he bowt 'isselt a velvet jacket.

“An’ then this wroitin’-wummun, what had no chest and a yaller face wi’ spectacles, she come, an’ took a cottage in the village. An’ then he got more sharp an’ tankerous than ever. But the more he carried on, the more oi loved him, an’ the more oi loved they woods. It weer nature.

“An’ then—an’ then—oi come down one noight from the Edge o’ the World, hevin’ bin to look at the valley beneath, an’ the moon an’ the stars, an’ oi come to moi cottage gate, yare, when ’oo should oi foind but Will Acton, the railway porter down to Petterling, an’ ’e tell me as ’im an’ ’er they hev gone orf together in the Lunnon train.

“An’ so I come in to see moi le’l son. An’ ’e was tankerous too, Gard bless ’im, be reason o’ the teethin’.

“An’ theer was lean toimes afower us. The vicar, as was the cause of it all, tho’ Gard must be his Judge, he was arl for parish relief. But oi would not make moiself chargeable for proide’s sake an’ for ’is’n—’e ’avin’ a crooked leg.

“Nór oi didn’t blame ’im ; for oi blamed moi stoopid self. Oi weer a foolish maiden, wi’ a maiden’s mumpses. An’ he weer a *Powit*. And oi could not ’oold ’is fancy.”

VI

POOR MR. WELCOME

AWAY down my lane, one morning, I passed a fine old man—tall, stout and hearty, with a blush-rose complexion. He was dressed like a labouring man, and he carried in his hand a worn but trusty-looking coal-hammer. He was conversing earnestly with Mr. Banks, the wheelwright ; he wore a strained expression, and seemed to be pleading.

Snatches of the old fellow's discourse forced themselves upon me as I passed : " No use at 'ome. . . . If you can call it 'ome. . . . No wife. . . . No darter. . . . On'y fourpence. . . . We was brought up together. . . . Very hard to part. . . . But what's the use ? . . . No wife at 'ome. . . . No 'ome, properly speaking."

Mr. Banks, the wheelwright, was shaking his head decisively. " There's plenty of work about," I heard him say.

I passed on, leading my dogs and thinking of spring onions—spring onions which wouldn't spring, or which, when sown as

onions, came up couch grass. I passed on thus, in bitterness, until I came unto my place of residence, where I sat down by the place where the Spanish iris ought to be and told my beads. I was disturbed in this employment by a click of the gate-latch; and, looking up, I beheld my fine old man, accompanied by his coal-hammer.

He lifted his cap in a respectful manner.

He said, with a boyish smile, "Good arfternoon to *you*, sir. I brought you round the good ole coal-hammer."

I stared at the man. "You've made a mistake," I said at last.

"No, sir, if *you* please," replied the stranger. "I was on me road here, when you passed, sir, along o' Master Duppy and Mister Don, sir."

This overwhelmingly respectful reference to my two dogs naturally won me. I said to him: "My good fellow, what is your name?"

"Mr. Welcome, sir," he answered, raising his cap in a respectful manner.

"Well, my man," I said, "I am sorry that you should have come so far with the coal-hammer, for I don't happen to be wanting one."

“Having lost me wife, sir,” explained Mr. Welcome, “I have no further use for it.”

I was sorry to hear of his loss, but—“I don’t want a coal-hammer,” I said again.

“But you’ll want this one,” urged Mr. Welcome. “’Tis a very old sort. They don’t make such coal-hammers as this in these days. I would be sorry to part with it. We was brought up together, this old coal-hammer and me. But a coal-hammer, that don’t be no manner o’ use to no one, without they got a ’ome. And you can’t call it ’ome without a wife. I don’t reckon to have no ’ome. I would take a shilling for it. ’Tis a good hammer. The old-fashioned sort. Let you take it in your hand and study the workmanship.”

I shook my head.

“Tenpence!” said Mr. Welcome.

“Cheer up!” I urged. “Perhaps you’ll find another wife; a brisk-looking man like you.”

“Ninepence!” said Mr. Welcome.

“Besides,” I pointed out, “even a widower must burn fires.”

“Eightpence!” said Mr. Welcome.

“It isn’t even kind to the memory of your

poor wife," I continued, "to break up the old home in this fashion."

"Sixpence!" said Mr. Welcome.

"Come, come," I cried, "be sensible!"

"Fourpence!" said Mr. Welcome.

There is a limit to my powers of resistance. I can be tempted once too often. I reflected that my own coal-hammer was distinctly inefficient. I said to Mr. Welcome, "You can leave it there."

Mr. Welcome threw down the coal-hammer with a sigh of satisfaction. "I couldn't abear to see the sight of it no longer," he explained; "'anging up there be the pore ole dresser, with the plates all dusty. What is 'ome without you got a wife to share it?"

I addressed some kindly, earnest words to Mr. Welcome. I pointed out, in all its forms, the weakness and futility of his attitude. I called him "Old chap," and urged him to buck up—to bite on the bullet, and all that sort of thing.

Mr. Welcome only sighed and shook his head.

"There is no 'ome without a wife," he submitted gloomily.

"But," I argued (still thinking of the coal-hammer), "you could at least exchange

it for something useful. What use will fourpence be to you ? ”

“ Times is ’ard, sir,” said Mr. Welcome, raising his cap in a respectful manner.

A great light broke in upon me. He looked so broad and round and pink—so essentially prosperous. It had not for one moment suggested itself to me that this man could be hungry. I picked up the coal-hammer and pressed it into his hands. “ In that case,” I said, “ you must take this back, and I will——”

“ No, no ! ” cried Mr. Welcome, interrupting me. “ Let you kip it, sir ; let you certainly kip it, sir. I cannot abear to look at the old thing—me ’aving no wife and no further use for it. Put it away, sir. Put it out o’ me sight. I am only asking fourpence.”

“ I am sorry that times are hard with you, Mr. Welcome,” I said. “ It is bad enough to lose one’s wife without having to worry about other things. Could you do with some bread and cheese ? ”

Mr. Welcome raised his cap in a respectful manner. He sighed and shook his head. “ ’Tis like this, sir,” he said ; “ I don’t seem to have no craving for food, not in these days. That don’t give no pleasure to me

any more. What is food without you got a wife to share it with you ? ”

I perceived that the poor fellow had worried himself into a thoroughly morbid state. I perceived that here was a case for the helping hand. So, casting an eye on the couch-grass, I spoke to him thus :

“ At any rate, Mr. Welcome, I can find you a little work, and I will speak to my friends about you. What do you say to a couple of days’ weeding, to begin with, in the garden here ? ”

“ Thanking you kindly, sir,” answered Mr. Welcome, raising his cap in a respectful manner, “ but I be no manner o’ use at the weeding. I get so sorrowful at the weeding : ’tis so easy a job. It set a man thinking. I got no use in me back, neither. And nobody to mind and docter it. What use for a man to look for work without ’e got a wife to kip him strong and hearty ? ”

“ Oh,” I answered—a little shortly—“ as you please.”

“ As *you* please, sir,” responded Mr. Welcome, enigmatically but respectfully, raising his cap.

I turned to go indoors ; but was detained by an anxious, sudden cough from Mr.

Welcome. "Begging your pardon, sir : thank you, sir," said he, "but you are forgetting the hammer. Glad I be to have it out of sight : though 'tis a fine hammer, sir, if on'y a man but had the wife and 'ome to go with it. Fourpence we said, I fancy, sir ? "

I took the hammer inside and searched my pockets for coin. I looked in this pocket and that pocket, and also in all the other pockets. I looked in my tobacco-box. I looked in my writing-desk. But I found no money. I found a cheque for three pounds and a postal order for ten shillings, neither of which documents I cared to bestow upon Mr. Welcome.

That gentleman raised his cap in a respectful manner when I went out to him. "I am sorry to find, Mr. Welcome," I stated cheerfully, "that I haven't fourpence in the house ; but if you will come round to-mor——"

Mr. Welcome's hand came down from his cap with a rush. "I suppose," he said, "that you call yeself a gentleman ? Gimme back my coal-hammer. Think I want to tramp down here again to-morrow for the sake of an illuminated fourpence ? "

"But," I stammered, "you—you could

guess that I would give you something for your trouble."

"Bah!" cried Mr. Welcome, shouldering the hammer; "a man might be in the jungles of Africa for all the chance there be of earning a drink in this stinkin' village."

I stood at the gate in a kind of stupor, and watched him take the coal-hammer away. He did not once look back.

Shortly afterwards I was joined by my Mrs. Pett, who brought steak for my modest dinner, and her little basket; her little green basket, which is always with her; always in and out of the back door.

"Fancy now," cooed Mrs. Pett; "I see that pore old Mr. Welcome as I come along the road."

"Why *poor* Mr. Welcome?" I demanded.

My Mrs. Pett looked at me blankly. "Are there *no* limits to the ignorance of this person?" her look seemed plainly to say. But all that she uttered was "Why, sir! ain't you heerd, then? He have lost his wife."

"Oh," I replied, "I have heard something of the sort. What did she die of?"

"Die!" echoed Mrs. Pett. "Why, bless you, sir, she be 'live as what I am. She

runned away from him, the hussy. He ain't never bin the same man since."

I wondered what Mr. Welcome was like when—when he was a different man. I asked how long ago this change of personality had taken place.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Pett, "before my time. And I bin settled in the village near on thirteen year. Pore man! He takes it bad."

"Poor, poor man," I echoed.

"Of course," added Mrs. Pett, after an inward struggle, "they *do* say as he used to beat her. But here they will say anything. Pore man!"

VII

THE FOSTER-CHILD

MRS. GEDGE, who was lately the mother of twin babies, but is now the mother of memories, had introduced a foster-child into her home.

It was to my mind an attractive foster-child, though many of Mrs. Gedge's neighbours denied it the possession, not merely of good looks, but even of quaint looks. This was sheer malice, for though I am open to admit that beauty, being in the eye of the beholder, is a quality which may be variously estimated by various eyes, I do not think that there is any excuse for people to disagree about the palpably grotesque—unless, of course, it can be that ugliness, also, is in the eye of the beholder, which I doubt, by reason of the absence of popular testimony to the existence of any such phenomenon.

Well, the fact remains that Mrs. Gedge's environment decried her foster-child and pronounced it ugly and "ugh"-ish. To them it seemed unnatural, perverse, and

even sinful that a woman should cherish in her bosom a little creature with long ears and bulgy eyes, and a tail like a powder-puff. Mrs. Gedge declared that the baby of her adoption was "so pratty a le'l rabbit as ever she see." Mrs. Pett, with whom was the daughter of Mrs. Pett and I your servant, went further, and declared that "Whiskers," which was the name that Mrs. Gedge conferred upon her foster-child, was intrinsically as well as generically beautiful. He was not merely a pretty rabbit: he was also a pretty baby. And he possessed the virtue of being dumb.

She found him—on a Friday, sadly enough—in the most tangled, beautiful, and silent of our lanes. Mrs. Gedge, being married, and therefore possessing no lover, had not, according to the local canons of behaviour, any just excuse for walking in this lane at all. But she told Mrs. Pett, who conveyed the excuse to me, that she went there to gather blackberries.

To my own town-nourished understanding, this was a seemly and natural thing for a woman to do: to walk alone between the autumn hedgerows. But local opinion seems to perceive in Mrs. Gedge's action either

simple insanity or simple—wickedness. As for blackberries, they, of course, are quite discredited.

Anyhow, the woman's own story is that she was gathering blackberries. At one particular point, the lane dips steeply down and is supported upon either side by tottering cliffs of sandstone, the slopes of which give scanty nourishment to some few poor briars and brambles, and the tops of which are crowned by quite a decent growth of sloes and hazels, with fern stuff in between them.

In this place "Whiskers" made his *début*. Some impulse, either of joy or fear, sent him scurrying out of the scrub-wood high up a bank, and thence to the ground by means of bounds and bumps and slithers. His unpremeditated descent of the sandstone, accompanied as it was by a sort of miniature landslide, deprived him, or seemed to deprive him, of reason and the faculty of motion. He lay in a muddy wheel-rut at the foot of the bank, so close to Mrs. Gedge's heel that, had she been a man, she could have stamped upon his head. He did not squeak or scream, as a leveret might have done, but simply lay there, breathing heavily and rolling his

two big eyes. Mrs. Gedge stooped down and lifted him, at which he began to struggle with great strength and determination. Being thus assured that "Whiskers's" acrobatic feats had resulted in no material damage to his person, Mrs. Gedge popped the little creature into her blackberry basket and carried him home.

"It be lonely for 'er," stated Mrs. Pett, in extenuation, "since she lost 'er two little boys. A little creature same as that be, something in the nature of a little pet, that would be a decent little ploy for 'er. Can't say as I see no 'arm in it meself."

"Does anybody see any harm in it?" I asked, with wonder.

"The neighbours," responded Mrs. Pett, "they say 'tis makin' a fool o' the pore little creature. She've taught it for to be about the kitchen, you see, and to foller 'er and answer to its name—the name o' 'Whiskers'—same as if it be a ole Tom Cat. And she've tied a ribbon round it and a bell."

"All seems rather harmless," I suggested.

"Sartinly," assented Mrs. Pett. "You may call it *simple* if you like; but harmless—sartinly.

"And then again," pursued my Chief of

Staff, "they say 'tis 'ard upon 'er 'usband, for they say she make 'im look a fool."

"I don't see why."

"No more don't I, not in a reg'lar manner o' speakin'," said Mrs. Pett; "on'y Tom Gedge, 'e seem to think the same as 'is neighbours. My little girl she 'eerd 'im shakin' of 'er yisterday. 'You dirty slut,' 'e say, 'be off outer this, and take your mangy rabbit with you. The kitchen aren't no place for varmin',' 'e say; 'take an' drowned it,' 'e say, 'an' look more cheerful, and stop that grizzerlin' afore I brings me belt-end to you.' 'E be a ignorant, scattle-mouthed dog, Tom Gedge."

"What has happened since?" I asked.

"Naarthun' aren't 'appened, in particular, on'y the neighbours they keep on mockin'. My little gel, she say as Nancy keep pore 'Whiskers' 'id away from Gedge now. She got 'im in the broken pig-sty at the fur end o' the garden. A tidy bit o' garden that be, and I dessay as Tom Gedge, 'e would a' nosed pore 'Whiskers' out 'fore now if ever the thought 'd a-took 'im for to do a 'arf-hour's diggin'. But Tom, 'e beant one for spare-time work—or any other time, so long as Nancy's able.

“ There be no doubt but what she got a wonderful talent for makin’ friends wi’ dumb animals. She ’ad a magpie in the winter as could swear remarkable, on’y Tom an’ ’is mates they shot at it with their catapults, and they ’it the pore bird so often that it died. And now my little gal she say as Mrs. Gedge be teachin’ young ‘ Whiskers ’ for to set up and beg, exactly the same as if ’e be a Christian.

“ My little girl she see them both among the marigolds this mornin’, arter Tom be gone to do a ’arf-day’s work. I left my little gal at our front gate a-watchin’ out for Tom, so’s she be able to warn pore Nancy if she see ’im turn the bend.”

Two days later Mrs. Pett brought further and final tidings of the foster-child.

“ I don’t know rightly what that bully, Tom, been up to,” she said ; “ but anybody can see as Nancy’s face ain’t ’arf the colour what it ought to be. But Nancy, she won’t talk to nobody—on’y to my little gal.

“ And my little gal she say she see them both last night aside the scullery wall. And Nancy got ’er face ’id up wi’ both ’er ’ands, and was stood back agin the wall, and Tom ’e pushed and digged ’er with ’is knee ; and

'e say to 'er : ' Git back, you dirty slut. Git back to your supper. 'Tis rabbit stew, I tell you.'

"And this morning," continued Mrs. Pett, "I see the neighbours laughin'. It don't seem right to me."

VIII

MRS. SAGE'S DAUGHTER

MY Mrs. Pett, who heretofore has never failed me—my Mrs. Pett of the little green basket, which poppeth in and poppeth out at the back door—did not keep her tryst one morning.

Having, therefore, postponed the ordeal of the toilet to the ultimate moment compatible with decency, I at last accomplished it on ice-water, and then proceeded to the lighting of fires. I was raking it all out again for the ——nth time when somebody snicked the gate-latch.

I flew to the window on wings of hope, and beheld—the village midwife.

“Ah!” I exclaimed, extruding my head from the window, “so that is how it is?”

“Well, sir,” admitted Mrs. Sage, “’e do think as she ’ave kep’ at work so close to ’er time as ’e dare let ’er.” “’E,” I knew instinctively, to be Mrs. Pett’s physician.

“Really,” I murmured, “I am awfully—

er—sorry. I didn't know—that is, I never guessed—er——”

“Oh, sir,” exclaimed my visitor, erecting an exemptory forefinger—“oh, sir, don't mention it. Pray don't apologise. Mrs. Pett, she *tell* me as you was a single gentleman.”

Concealing my blushes behind the curtain, I ventured to address to Mrs. Sage a few discreet inquiries.

“It will be five weeks, first and last, before you git 'er back again,” responded Mrs. Sage.

I sighed.

“But,” pursued my visitor, “I be come round special for to tell you as we can find a suitable party to carry you on in the meantime.”

“Who is the party?”

“To tell you the truth, sir,” answered Mrs. Sage, “'tis me darter: not,” she added hastily, discerning signs of trepidation in my gaze, “*not* the well-known one.

“No,” said Mrs. Sage, “'tis me second darter, Kate, what I speak of. Mrs. Pett, she say to me, she say: ‘Now that *would* be nice,’ she say, ‘if you could anyways persuade your Kate to goo 'long and oblige

my gentleman, time as I'm laid up. Such a quiet, well-mannered, handy, respectable girl your Kate be,' she say. 'That *be* a darter, that one,' say she."

"How old is Kate?" I inquired.

"Well, sir," responded Mrs. Sage, "she *look* eighteen."

"Yes; but how old *is* she?"

"She got 'er 'air up," said Mrs. Sage.

I tried again, in the native idiom: "How old do you call her?"

"Not a long way off eighteen," said Mrs. Sage.

I gave up the pursuit at this and began to reflect—out loud. "After all," I reflected, "somebody must light the fires."

"You engage 'er, then?" quoth Mrs. Sage.

"You can send her round," I said.

"She's engaged, then?" repeated Mrs. Sage.

"She's invited to come round and—I'll see," said your servant.

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Sage. "Oh. . . . Very well, then." And the wise old soul departed, thinking deeply. I begged her to carry my congratulations to Mr. Pett.

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Sage.

And I found, in what my Mrs. Pett imagines

vainly to be a secret place, some methylated spirit and the things belonging to her hair-irons. And I poured a teacupful of water into a kettle and lighted the little spirit-stove, and held the kettle over it and waited and—waited. I had waited for nearly an hour, and the kettle had nearly begun to sing when—the gate-latch clicked again.

Again the hope frothed up within my bosom ; again it suddenly subsided. For I went to the gate, and all that I found there was an awkward, red-nosed little girl, suffering badly from modesty and chilblains.

I spoke to her kindly, but with firmness. “ You have come,” I said, “ to tell me that Kate *can't* come.”

“ Ef you please, sir,” replied the little girl, “ I *be* Kate.”

My head reeled so that I had to sit down on the doorstep.

“ Please will I do ? ” demanded Kate.

“ My God ! ” quoth I, “ you’ll have to do. I’m frost-bitten.”

“ So then I be engaged ? ” asked Kate, with a touch of the maternal spirit.

I nodded.

“ So then,” said Kate, “ I kin let down me ’air again.”

With that I perceived that her coiffure had been dressed up in the adult manner. She removed two hairpins and shook herself, and it all came down.

"Mo'er," explained Kate, "she tell me as I got to kip it up until I see if you'd engage me." She rubbed one row of chilblains against the other row of chilblains and snuffled. I insisted on lending her my pocket-handkerchief.

"Well, Katherine," I said, "come along in and start."

"What I gotter do?" demanded Katherine.

"As to that," I answered, "you can't go much astray by trusting to the guidance of your woman's instinct."

"La!" cried Kate, "and beant there neer a fire?"

"Devil a spark!" I replied. "And the bed isn't made, and the room isn't dusted, and all my shirts are buttonless, and I want some food."

"What you got to eat?" demanded Kate.

"Boiled bacon," I replied, "but it hasn't been boiled yet."

"Ain't I better see to that, then?"

“ You’ll want a fire to cook it with, won’t you ? ” I suggested.

“ My mo’er,” stated Kate, with candour, “ she reckoned as the fire ’d be lighted ’fore I got yere. ’Tis a down fire, too. We aren’t got no down fires at *our* ’ome. Do you think I can manage it ? ”

“ Try,” I commanded.

Kate did try ; but the experiment, opposed as it was by hair in the eyes and snuffles, failed to achieve success. So we soaked some logs in paraffin, and got by way of art that which Nature had denied us. Katherine then addressed herself to the more congenial subject of bacon.

“ Be I supposen,” she demanded, “ to peel off the skin, or be I supposen to leave it bide ? ”

“ You leave it bide,” I answered, “ until the bacon has quite done boiling. They say it comes off easier then.”

“ I shouldn’t be surprised,” admitted Katherine, nodding wisely. “ Where’ll I find your stew-pot ? ”

We found the pot, and Katherine completed, after a fashion quite original, the preliminary toilet of the bacon. While the pot was simmering, her busy hands found

work to do in my bed-chamber. There she encountered her first set-back ; for, having (naturally enough) induced the ewer to stand up on the bed, it toppled over and soused the bed-clothes and broke itself.

“There, now !” cried Kate ; “if that beant aggravating ! I’m sorry.” The snuffles became so loud—and long—that I begged her to keep the handkerchief and make a habit of it.

“There, now !” repeated Katherine suddenly, “ef that beant aggravating !”

“What is the matter this time ?” I inquired.

“I dursn’t ’ardly tell you,” answered Katherine, snuffling horribly ; “on’y some’ow —’tis rare wonderful ’ow ever I done it—some’ow I got the par’fin mixed up ’long o’ the bacon.”

We sat down upon widely separated chairs and regarded one another. At last I found my voice. “Lend me my pocket-handkerchief for a minute,” I said, “and we’ll try to think what can be done.”

“Ef you got any cow-cow——” began Kate ; but I quelled her with a snarl of rage.

The snuffles began again, exhibiting unprecedented vigour.

“ Mo’er,” said Kate, protruding her underlip, “ had oughter sent you me big sister, not a young girl like me. On’y me sister, you can’t trust ’er with the men. . . .”

Kate got up from her chair, still snuffling, and fumbled patiently in a nether pocket. Then she came towards me, holding out an exiguous package.

“ N-never m-mind ! ” she said. “ ’Ave a acid-drop.”

IX

CUCKOO

ONE sunny afternoon in November, having a great deal of work to do, I thought that I would refrain from doing it. I thought I would give the dogs an airing, and find out how far November could really go in her ambition to be mistaken for May. I observed that two daffodils in an open border had been deceived into putting forth buds ; that a lilac had broken out into little frills of leaf ; that out in the lane the palm had almost got into its Easter suit. " We shall pay for this later," says we to ourselves, gravely and wisely in the local manner. And then, with a crack of the dog-whip, which frightened nobody except some crows two fields away, we trotted off, and did not stop trotting until our breath gave out, when we captured a stile and rested. We captured the stile by Goddard's Piece, and there we sat and puffed and blew, and watched the busy world go by.

It was indeed a busy world, as busyness is reckoned here. Six people passed us. And

the first of them was Mr. Blick, our rate-collector.

"Marnin' to *you*, sir," said Mr. Blick. "You aren't got ne'er a light, I s'pose?"

I handed to the rate-collector not only a box of matches, but my tobacco-pouch as well. Greater love hath no man.

"'Tis wonderful weather we be havin'," observed Mr. Blick, with a flourish of thanks. "That seem a'most a shame to go out collectin' sich weather as this: sich proper gardenin' weather. When may I look to you for that little matter o' one-pun-eight?"

"Thanks for the reminder," I said. "I must take a walk your way one morning and settle up."

"That's right," said Mr. Blick. "Don't come a Thursday, nor yet Sarturday."

"I won't," quoth I.

"Because I goo to market them days," continued Mr. Blick. "Nor don't come Wednesday arternoon——"

"Certainly not!" I cried.

"Because I goos to chapel Wednesday arternoons," explained the rate-collector. "But Monday, Tuesday, and Friday, or Wednesday marnin' anybody be *sure* to find me atome if they pass by."

"I will make a careful note of the days, and arrange my movements accordingly," I said.

"That's right," repeated Mr. Blick. "Wonderful weather : so spring-like. One-pun-eight. Good day to *you*, sir."

Mr. Blick moved on, but he had proceeded scarcely a yard when he suddenly stopped and threw up his nose, like an old fox scenting the wind. "I could swear I 'ear the cuckoo jest that minute," said Mr. Blick. "Per'aps it weer on'y some fool 'ollerin. This one-pun-eight, that only takes you to December quarter. There'll be another lot due direckly. You be got a trifle backard in your payments. I mention it so's we shan't 'ave no misunderstandin's. 'Tis one-pun-eight for the 'arf-year endin' Christmas. Theer 'e goo again ! Begod, that sound uncommon like the cuckoo."

This time Mr. Blick did really move ; and I watched his shabby coat-tails catch the breeze as he hurried round the bend in search of cuckoos or a ratepayer.

The next busy worldling to appear was Mrs. Winch, of Polecat Farm.

"Good marnin' to *you*, sir," said Mrs. Winch. "Bean't you gone to the asylum, then ? "

I gazed at the woman with an icy gaze.

"I mean to the openin' of the noo water-works," she added. "All the idle folk be gone to the asylum 'smornin'. They got the Gen'ral and Sir William and Squire Dukes and a band and a parade o' the lunatics and what not. 'Tis a grand set-out, from all I 'ear. That surprise me you bean't gone there. It's a thing that anybody didn't oughter miss, so long's they got nothin' else to do on'y set on a stile and look innercent."

"Not going there yourself, then, Mrs. Winch?" I hazarded.

"Not me," responded that lady in a crisp voice. "'Tain't everybody aren't got nothin' else to do only set on stiles or goo to the asylum. I got my customers to 'tend to or else where be I when it come to quarter-day?"

So saying, Mrs. Winch tied up her butter-cloth a little tighter and bustled off. I watched her to the bend, where, suddenly, she stopped and looked about her with a puzzled air. Then flinging me a backward glance, she uttered a final gibe:

"Sit theer long enough," she said, "and you'll 'ear the cuckoo, shouldn't wonder."

"The vulgar mind appears to be obsessed with cuckoos this morning," thought I to my-

self ; and at that moment the pipe fell out of my mouth : for from out of the coppice which crowned the sloping pastures that lay before my gaze there issued, full and clear, the veritable call of the cuckoo.

I had hardly got my teeth together again when another worldling came along. This was young Mr. Smith from The Hall : Mr. Ivor Smith, I think ; or was it Mr. Cosmo Smith or Mr. Derek Smith ? I really wasn't certain. They all wear dove-grey motor caps.

" Cheer *Oh !* " said Mr. Smith.

" Cheer *Oh !* " I responded.

" By Gad ! " cried Mr. Smith, " you *are* a lucky rotter. You never seem to have anything in particular to do. And that's a ripping dog of yours. Think yourself jolly lucky not to be a poor devil like me with a beastly tutor nosin' after him every blessed step he takes. Goin' to this do at the asylum ? "

" No," I said ; " are you ? "

" No jolly fear," responded Mr. Smith. " The pater's had to go, and he's taken my tutor with him. I've done a guy. I'm goin' to meet a bookmaker chap at Blowfield. Come along too. We can have a game of pills."

I shook my head. " I'm listening to the cuckoo," I said.

" Oh ! " said Mr. Smith, without wonder. He is the sort of country gentleman to whom the cuckoo in November presents no problem. " I suppose you can afford to waste an afternoon : I jolly well can't. It isn't often I can shake that beastly tutor off. I must shove on. Pip-pip ! "

" Pip-pip ! " I responded.

Mr. Smith had barely remounted his bicycle when a steaming stranger in a blue uniform appeared before me. " I—I—sp-pose," he spluttered, missing badly, as the motorists say, " I sp-pose you ain't seed ne'er a stranger pass this way—a wild-looking young bloke in—in a grey woollen j-jacket wi' brass buttons ? "

" No," I said ; " but I have heard the cuckoo. Stop and rest a minute and you will hear him too. There ! "

" I 'ear the bleater all right," replied the agitated stranger ; " on'y I aren't got the time to stand about and listen to no blasé birds. I'm from the asylum, and one of our inmates 'as took 'isself off while these yere festivities was on. That's the worst of givin' the beggars any pleasure."

" There he is ! " I said.

" Where ? " cried the man in uniform.

“Over there—the cuckoo, I mean.”

“Oh, bother the cuckoo!” exclaimed the man. “I can’t stop!” And he was off and round the bend before the sagacious bird had time to mock him.

And then, as I lighted that which I said should be my final pipe, old Dan’l Pearce appeared, and with him young Thomas Gupp. They were running breast by breast—running hard.

“What’s up?” I cried.

“It’s a loony got loose out o’ the asylum,” called back old Dan’l, slackening down for a moment. “There’s five bob for the bloke what first spies him.”

“But have you heard the cuckoo?” I rejoined.

Mr. Pearce did not reply. “Bustle up, young Thomas: keep moving,” he said to his companion.

I smoked that last pipe out up on the stile, and lit another. And nobody came by. I saw the slow smoke rising from some fire behind the cuckoo’s wood. I saw the sun swing round and wink upon the cuckoo’s wood, and ever and anon the cuckoo himself spoke up and gave the sun a call.

But the intervals of silence between the cuckoo’s song grew gradually longer, until at

last there came an interval so long that I gave the cuckoo up. I thought he had flown off to coax the sun to some more western wood. "If he has gone," I thought, "there is no point in getting any stiffer." So I slipped off the stile and was knocking my pipe against my boot-heel when—"Cuckoo!" There he was, right at my elbow.

As I looked and wondered, the hedgerow opposite began suddenly to crackle, and through the brambles crept a boy: a freckled, moon-faced boy. He was wearing a queer, grey suit.

He tore himself clear of the brambles and came out into the lane. I saw that he held in his hand a couple of dry reeds, one short, one long. These he had tied together with a strip of cloth; and he stood in the lane to adjust this bandage with peculiar tenderness. Every now and then he would leave his task to dance a few quick steps in the sunshine and to whistle gaily in imitation of a blackbird. Then he put his mouth to the reeds and—his eyes found mine. He took the reeds from his mouth and looked at me sheepishly, but with a grin.

"Hello!" I cried. "So you're the lunatic?"

“That’s right, guv’nor,” he replied, quite gravely, and put the reeds up to his mouth again and blew :

“Cuckoo ! Cuckoo ! Cuckoo ! ”

And so he went hopping round the bend.

X

JACK O' CLUBS

I FIRST found Jack o' Clubs in a drain.

His private name, I understand, is Mr. Pontefract. But his convives and critics call him "Jack o' Clubs."

The drain belonged to my neighbour, an irreproachable schoolmistress. This lady, on an autumn evening, addressed me thus : " Oh, dear, I *am* so glad to see you. We *are* in such a way ! *Would* you get a stick and *could* you take it up the meadow ? The girls were *just* going out to send off some little fireworks before their tea : but they all came back so frightened. They *declare* there are men in the meadow."

Did I hesitate ? No ! Amid the cheers of a complete and undivided girls' school, your servant seized a pitchfork and sallied forth into the twi-fog to reason with these unknowns.

For a long while nothing happened because, once beyond the range of all those sparkling eyes, I ceased to hasten. But the slowest walk is bound to lead you somewhere in the

course of nature : and mine brought me, ultimately, to the top of the meadow : and there, creeping softly, I did indeed behold a man : or rather the trunk and legs of a man, which extruded themselves from the orifice of a land-drain. The trunk I examined with my pitchfork, and the complete animal said "Ow !" and came out of the drain.

The man stood up, and I beheld him. He was six foot long and very aquiline. He had a Roman nose and amber-coloured whiskers. He looked exactly like that impossible type of Briton who figures in French and Italian political cartoons. He was dressed in madly checked trousers and a long cut-away coat, and on his head he wore a little brown hat of the bowler pattern. He was not clean.

I said to him : "What——" and would have amplified and decorated the inquiry ; but I was lost in admiration of his exquisite manners. He had the most respectful and effective smirk that I have ever looked upon. He stood before me with his feet together, his eyes cast down, and his neck cricked gently forward, whilst he repeatedly touched his hat. And he spoke :

"Good evenin', sir. Cold night, sir. Can I sell you a little teapot, sir ? "

“What next?” I cried.

“’Pon me word, ’tis a little beauty, sir. A rare little beauty, sir. ’Tis, ’pon me word, sir. I ain’t got it here; but——” He stated these facts in a harsh, croaking voice: but with a touch of feeling and conviction. And he never forgot to keep on touching his hat.

“Look here,” I said, interrupting the monologue, “this is not a moment for selling teapots. I came up here to see what you were up to. What the devil *are* you up to?”

“’Pon me word, sir,” responded the stranger, drawing closer to the mouth of the drain, “I was looking up the pipe, sir; that’s all, sir; ’pon me word, sir. I’m on’y ’ere to speak the truth, sir. I was walkin’ ’ome along the other medder, sir, and I see this bit of fencin’ broken down, sir, and I come along into this medder to try and put it up, sir, and I see this drain, sir, and the fancy took me to look inside it, sir, and then you come, sir, and that’s all, sir, ’pon me word, sir; may I never move again, sir! Could I sell you the little old teapot, sir?”

“What did you expect to see in the drain?” I coldly inquired.

“Pair of brass anderirons any good to you, sir?” responded the stranger. “I know

where there's a very 'andsome pair, sir. 'Pon me word, they're beauties. The genelman would take ten shillin's for 'em, sir."

I wanted to terminate this interview. It was raw and cold up there in the unsheltered meadow. I therefore pointed a commanding finger at the horizon and ordered the stranger to be off. "Don't let me ever catch you here again," I said, "or——" I left the details of this alternative to the stranger's obviously fertile imagination. "You've given Miss Smee's young ladies an awful fright," I added.

"I wouldn't 'arm the prutty le'l dears, 'pon me word I wouldn't," replied the stranger. "I'm the father of females meself, 'pon me word I am, sir."

"Now go," I said ; "and don't come back again."

"No, sir : certainly not, sir : 'pon me word, I won't, sir : thank you very much, sir." The stranger tapped his hat more frequently than ever. I turned to walk away ; but, on a sudden impulse, turned back again, and was in time to see the stranger produce from the field-drain a long, yellow animal, which he slipped into one of his fourteen pockets. He saw that I saw : but all he did

was to renew the smirk and to resume the hat-touching, and to inquire, with a more hopeful thrill than ever in his croak : " Could you do with a little old-fashioned flat-iron, sir ? 'Pon me word, 'tis a wonderful good one, sir. I ain't got it with me, but——"

I did not stop to hear the end of this speech, but left him to emptiness and his conscience. I returned to Miss Smee and explained, with modest brevity, that I had found a fellow skulking up there and had ousted him, with appropriate censure.

Miss Smee took my hand and thanked me. All the young ladies took my hand and thanked me. I stayed to high-tea. I helped to send up fireworks. I helped the braver (and least juvenile) of the young ladies to hold the safety ends of Golden Rains and Roman Candles. Then I accepted further thanks and returned to my domicile. And there I found—the stranger !

He was standing flat against the gate-post, and I at first believed him to be the shadow of a plum tree. But plum trees do not touch their hats and croak. The stranger said :

" Good evenin', sir. 'Tis very cold, sir. I brought the little old-fashioned teapot, sir. 'Tis a rare old-fashioned little piece. 'Pon me

word, 'tis very old, sir. I'll take five shillin' for it, sir."

"You'll take yourself off," I said. "What's the use of skulking round here at this time of night with your damned teapots?"

"'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a rare old-fashioned little piece. Belonged me own grandmother, sir. 'Tis a 'undred years old, sir. I'll say four shillin', sir. 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a bargain."

"In about two seconds," I replied, "this dog will cease to be under control."

"Threé shillin's, sir. 'Pon me word 'tis giving it to you."

"Get out!" I thundered.

"Two shillin's," croaked the stranger.

At that I lost my temper and released the dog from custody. The faithful creature forthwith leapt upon the stranger and—licked his boots. "'Pon me word, sir," said the stranger, "'tis bitter cold. Will you *lend* me the two shillin's on me pedlar's licence?"

I called my pampered brute to heel again and reflected bitterly that he had that day been regaled upon four-pennyworth of butcher's filings. I determined to stop it out of his filings. And I said to the stranger: "If

you are a pedlar, permit me to tell you that you are going the right way to get yourself reported to the police." To which comment, the stranger replied as follows :

" 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis that bitter I'll take a shilling down."

To get rid of him, I disgorged the shilling, taking the teapot (an excessively common one, with a broken spout) in exchange : for I felt that as a mere matter of duty to fellow-citizens, it was incumbent upon me to disarm the man.

When next morning my Mrs. Pett arrived, accompanied by her little green basket, without whose assistance she finds it impossible to cook my breakfast, I described the stranger to her and demanded his name. Mrs. Pett closed both eyes and thought, mentally examining the identification marks. " Salmon-coloured whiskers, did you say ? " she demanded at last. " Amber," I repeated. " Ah ! " said Mrs. Pett. " Amber. 'Tis nearly the same. That'll be Mr. Pontefract—Jack o' Clubs, we call him."

" Pontefract ! " I echoed. " Ha—who is Pontefract ? "

" *Mr.* Pontefract ? " said Mrs. Pett, with a shade of emphasis on the title. " I dunno

justly *what* he be. They say he's none too honest; but I've allus found him prompt enough in paying for aught as he's bought of me."

"What does he buy from you, Mrs. Pett?" I inquired.

"Odds and ends," replied that lady. "He bought a cracked old teapot yesterday. Give me tuppence. As I say to my little boy, it's the price of a pint—of milk: and the teapot, that were no manner of use. Yes: I've allus found that Jack have acted *very* fair in any dealings which he've had with me."

Going out presently into the garden to bury the teapot, I was not surprised to find that Mr. Pontefract awaited me on the other side of the hedge. As I looked again upon his grave, judicial countenance and listened to his gentle, apprehensive cough, I thought how natural it was that my Mrs. Pett should insist upon the Mister. Amber whiskers and cut-away coats are born, as it were, to be Mistered. Said Mr. Pontefract: "Would you buy a little old-fashioned candlestick, me gentleman? 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a remarkable old one."

I finished burying the teapot, and then I addressed myself in simple, unaffected Saxon

to Jack o' Clubs. He did not wince. He simply murmured "candlestick."

I retreated to my homestead and closed the door with a bang. I sat at a table and tried to work ; but I could not keep my eyes from the window, which framed a neat picture of Mr. Pontefract, patiently leaning against a willow tree, nursing a neat sack. When I could stand it no longer, I rushed outside and bought his hateful candlestick.

"'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a bargain," was Mr. Pontefract's only comment. He inserted a hand in the sack and produced the candlestick, also a much used pair of tongs. "This little old-fashioned pair of tongs any use to you, young gentleman?" he sweetly inquired. "They be very old-fashioned, sir. Mattered iron, sir. I'll take a shilling. 'Pon me word, it's cheap, sir."

I bought the tongs. And he went away. But late that night I found he had come back again with a pair of fire-dogs. He nursed the fire-dogs all night, and in the morning he was still there ; and—judging his moment—he fainted all over the willow tree just as I had cracked my first egg. I bought the fire-dogs.

I said to Mr. Pontefract : "Why do you

pay me such attention ? I only met you by accident—in a drain ! ” And he answered :

“ Ah, sir, but you’ve got such a look of the gentleman.”

And to-night he has come back again. He says, “ I’ve seen the party about that fire-back, sir. He’ll take eight shillin’ for it, sir. ’Pon me word, sir, ’tis a wonderful good fire-back. ’Undred years old, sir. Mallered iron, sir. He say I got to bring the money before he let me have the fire-back, sir. Will you let me have the money ? ’Pon me word, ’tis cruel cheap, sir. You can trust me with the money, sir. ’Pon me word I wouldn’t deceive you. Dated 1820, sir.”

For the second time I have closed my door upon Jack o’ Clubs and the night. But I can hear him breathing by the willow tree. To-morrow morning he will still be there. He will reproduce the fainting fit. I shall give him the eight shillings. He will either abscond with this money or bring a fire-back. In the meantime, I shall have felled his willow tree.

If in the face of this rebuff he still returns, I shall play my trump card : I shall move to Lanarkshire.

I am determined to get a divorce from Mr. Pontefract.

XI

ROSE-IN-HAIR

It happened months ago. Or was it years ago? Or did it ever happen? The strawberries were ripe . . . so long ago it was. One likes to believe that it happened, anyhow. I will tell you about it.

You must understand that I possess a gate and two tubs. These—and a strawberry patch—are the only properties essential to this story.

The tubs belong outside the gate. Mrs. Sharman Crawford lives in one of them and M. Able Carrière in the other. And these are full-lipped flaming roses, both of them, and they are the joy of my heart.

People had said to me: "You *are* an idiot to leave your roses loose outside your gate. Do you expect to keep a single blossom?"

Mr. Tracey, who jobs for me, said: "It ain't in 'uman nature, sir!"

I said to people: "I will trust my fellow-man. But . . . no; I will trust my fellow-man."

And as the June days lengthened (copyright phrase: United Kingdom and U.S.A.) I had

reason to congratulate myself upon the confidence which I had placed in my fellow-man.

The roses sent forth shoots and budded and broke. People—sometimes so many as four in a day—came “ ’otchlin’ ” past the gate and looked upon the tubs and the roses and were glad, and touched not, and passed on. . . . I was proud of the roses, and of myself, and of my fellow-man.

But one Sabbath morning, as I looked forth upon the fairway, and the roses, and the tubs, a sudden, unexpected agony of fear took hold of me. . . . Supposing that my fellow-man *should* fall? The roses had so surpassed themselves this morning; they had reached the moment of apotheosis. Mrs. Sharman Crawford made me reel with her splendour, her fragrance. It was as awful, almost, as . . . *their* fragrance.

Sundays, especially June Sundays, bring traffic to my lane. We get the courting pairs and little boys with catapults. I had tended those roses for eleven months and two weeks. When you buy two portions of oil-tub and treat them handsomely to paint, and deck them with a Sharman Crawford and an Able Carrière, and watch them daily, hourly, for eleven months and two weeks in order to be

proud and happy for a fortnight—when, I say, you do all this—why, you like to get your fortnight ; all of it.

So I went indoors and found four mouse-traps ; four common, penny mouse-traps, the kind which work with a spring, and these I “ set ” and concealed with cunning amidst the foliage of my rose-trees—two traps to each tree.

Then I got out the lawn-mower and pushed it here and there about the grass—this being the Sabbath Day and I in want of ploy.

When you have pushed a fourteen-inch mower for second after second—in June—you have to stop. *I* stopped, and had hardly put it to my lips when my attention was arrested by certain sudden sounds—a quick, sharp “ click,” followed by a little shriek.

“ Great God ! ” I reflected ; “ somebody has found a mouse-trap.” And calling my largest dog to heel, I stalked round to the rose-tubs.

There I beheld the evil-doer. A . . . girl !

She was examining with stupefied amazement her little finger—such a little, little finger—which was held fast in the not very powerful jaws of the mouse-trap. I perceived that the fairest and most fragrant of my Sharman Crawfords had become detached

from its stem and now figured rather gaily amid her hair—which was dark and thick. I perceived that her complexion was good: a clean, transparent russet. She had white teeth and her eyes were not quite even. I have noticed that many pretty girls exhibit that curious, fascinating trick of the eyes. It would be beastly and unfair to call it a squint.

I said to her, “Allow me !” and rushed at the mouse-trap. She looked up as I spoke and drew back a step.

“Be you the Boss ?” she said.

I nodded, and taking her hand released the little finger.

“’Tis yere own fault, then,” said the girl. “You didn’t oughter tempt folk. Ain’t it a beauty ?” she added, touching the rose in her hair.

“Aren’t *you* a beauty ?” I thought ; but refrained from uttering the obvious. Instead, I plucked a few more roses—six, perhaps ; maybe a dozen—and—“Be they for *me* ?” said the girl.

I explained that I was sorry about her finger. She laughed at me.

“Why,” said the girl, “it bean’t so much as swelled. Look.” She held the little little-finger out.

I looked.

“ You aren’t got ne’er a stretch o’ string, I suppose ? ” demanded Rose-in-Hair, then. “ ’Twould be shameful if I dropped some.”

I found the string and Rose-in-Hair unknotted it with her strong white teeth. “ Catch on to the blooms a minute, will you ? ” she commanded. I caught on.

Rose-in-Hair sat down upon the edge of the nearest tub and spread out her skirts. I sat down upon the edge of the other tub and watched her.

“ You kin gimme back the blooms now,” she said.

Rose-in-Hair had evidently an exact and particular taste in respect to nosegays. She arranged and disarranged and rearranged those roses quite a dozen times while I . . . just watched her. After the twelfth attempt, she seemed a little weary ; dropped them back into her lap again with a petulant gesture, and stretched up her arms and yawned—without apology or concealment. Then, looking at me lazily from under her straight black brows and looking up the road and down the road, Rose-in-Hair said coyly :

“ Is that fag an orph’n ? ”

“ Dear me, n-no,” I stammered, hastily producing a caseful of duplicates.

"Can I take two?" said Rose-in-Hair. "Don't often get a chance at this. . . . They're strict at home. I'll show you 'ow to make the smoke go corkscrew, same as my brother taught me."

I watched this performance with interest and duly applauded its originality. Rose-in-Hair picked up her flowers again and began to reassemble them, but pricked her finger and threw them down, with an exclamation which is often employed by English people. "'Ere," said Rose-in-Hair, then, "can't you 'elp me with these silly blooms?"

I naturally could not refuse.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "if you would allow me to sit down on the tub—ah—beside you—ah——"

Rose-in-Hair looked up the lane, and Rose-in-Hair looked down the lane, and Rose-in-Hair looked at me more lazily than ever, and said . . . "M', yes!"

So I got up from my tub and assisted Rose-in-Hair to tie up her flowers.

I was thus occupied—Rose-in-Hair protesting somewhat at my method, which crushed one of the blossoms—when a horrible, discordant shout broke in upon the stillness of our rustic occupation.

I looked up ; and beheld the angry countenance of an agricultural labourer, dressed in military uniform. It was this gentleman's voice which had so startled us.

" Hi ! Keep orf the grarse ! " shouted the stranger.

Rose-in-Hair got up from the tub with a laugh and offered the stranger a rose. That vocalist repeated himself :

" Hi, young fellar ; keep orf the grarse ! " he shouted.

" Don't mind him," said Rose-in-Hair. " That be only my Perkin. I expected him along."

" Call orf that bandy dawg and I'll show ye which of us is a man," said Perkin cordially.

" The dog's deaf," I replied.

" What you gotter say for yeself ? " demanded Perkin.

I looked at Perkin with an unintelligent expression.

Perkin patiently explained his meaning.

" Did I see you," he inquired, " with your bandy arm round that young lady's waist ? "

" You did," I responded ; " and if you had postponed your arrival for two minutes you would have seen me get the kiss which I'd asked for eight times."

“ Well,” said Perkin, “ what you gointer do about it ? ”

“ Give it up, I suppose, seeing that you’ve had the bad taste to appear.”

“ What I mean to say,” explained Perkin, with characteristic patience and courtesy, “ is this : Are you gointer call orf that dog and let me ’ave a goo at ye ? ”

“ No,” I replied. “ But if you care to step into the garden and join your *fiancée* and myself at tea, we shall be pleased to give you some strawberries and cream.”

“ There, Perkin ! ” cried out Rose-in-Hair. “ Hear what the gentleman say ? Give him yere hand and thank him.”

Perkin had walked far. His mouth and newly born moustache were dusty. His red coat looked unseasonable. He leant upon the gate-post, and opened his mouth and shut it, and opened it again, and then he spoke.

“ That’s a proper notion,” he said.

So I sat them under the quince tree and brought forth the feast.

The militia-man’s way with strawberries was prompt, effective, and astonishing to watch. His pace was so rapid, however, that Rose-in-Hair got winded. I had to come to Rose-in-Hair’s assistance. But just as I was popping

the third one (such a whopper, too) between her interesting lips, Perkin chanced to look up from his plate and immediately revived his war-cry, with the result that the whopper got dropped and trodden on. Rose-in Hair, however, rewarded me with a sad, kind smile.

When it became perfectly evident to Perkin that he had cleared the strawberry bed, he condescended to talk.

"You got a nice li'l place," he said. I assented.

"That lay a bit low, mind you!"

"Too low, do you think?"

"Well—a *bit* low," persisted Perkin. "That lay the wrong side of the 'ills, too. Y'oughter goo Worthing way to grow strawberry. They *can* grow strawberry at Worth-ing. Grass want cutting, I see."

I assented, nodding towards the lawnmower as proving my independent cognisance of this fact.

"Tell you what," cried Perkin suddenly—"I'll mow ye the lot for two bob!"

"Here? Now?" I demanded.

"To *be* sure," assented Perkin. "Won't take me above a hour to run over the lot."

"Nor 'arf," assented Rose-in-Hair.

"Then go ahead," I said. . . . "I have never been mown by the military before."

"'Tis on'y the Militia *I* belongs to," replied Perkin, with a deprecatory smile. He unbuttoned his jolly red jacket and moistened the palms of his hands.

"This be a *Mower*, *I* see," announced Perkin, after a preliminary flutter round a tree-trunk—"Now we're off."

And off they were. I watched his broad, red back receding up the lawn.

"He can *mow*!" said a voice from beside me. . . .

Rose-in-Hair then slipped her arm in mine. "Beant you gointer pluck me neer another bloom?" she said.

Glancing furtively along the lawn, I perceived, with a pang of joy, that my ripping old lawn-mower had gone and ruptured itself again.

These mishaps are of absorbing interest to any person possessing the mechanical mind. And they take *hours* to repair.

Rose-in-Hair touched my hand and—held it. We tripped to the rose-tub . . . treading softly . . . the big dog following.

We plucked some rose-buds.

And Perkin mowed the lawn.

XII

IVY LEAVES

It was Wednesday, and therefore an " off " day at Preece's Farm.

Tuesdays and Fridays are butter-making days in our part of the world. On Mondays we wash, and on Thursdays we bake. On Saturdays we scrub the oilcloth and rehang the curtains, and buy hairpins at Blowfield, and otherwise prepare ourselves for the dreadful Sabbath. Wednesday is anybody's day, except in the prime months of the year, when every maid and housewife in the village gives herself up from two o'clock till tea-time to the game of stool-ball, which is cricket in petticoats.

But you cannot play stool-ball in February. You cannot do anything except work hard and dream about Easter.

So she came out to the front gate, her " second " apron full of Wednesday crackle, and looked distastefully up the road.

I do not know who she was—a Preece, no doubt. Jane Hopkins Preece, perhaps, or

Ellen Martha Preece, or, no less conceivably, Victoria Alexandra Preece. A suety girl with nice eyes but bad teeth.

Her hair had evidently once set up to be golden ; but Nature, exerting the law of the countryside, had adapted it to the prevailing hue of the surroundings—a sort of a pale mud colour. Just where it swept her forehead—and therefore lay in danger of being fluttered by vain winds—she had fashioned her hair into a series of small, tight knobs, kept in place by narrow strips of lead.

She stood there scowling at the road, till, suddenly, the nice eyes opened wider and the round face slowly stirred itself to dimples. She had seen a man.

Victoria Alexander Preece—this I am now persuaded was her name—had looked on men before—upon all sorts of men, from the heavy-footed males of her own species up to kid-gloved auctioneers and the lawyers' clerks of Blowfield, not to mention the dapper young person who tuned the Preece's Farm piano.

Being thus guided by knowledge and experience, Victoria Alexandra was perfectly definite in her approval of this man. He was a stranger. . . . His boots were shiny. . . . His hair all curled. . . . He wore a hard,

black hat. . . . He came from abroad, from afar. . . . He came—oh, romance!—from the town. Victoria Alexandra held her breath.

He was short and fat, but neatly shaven, though blue. His forehead had been marred by an occurrence incidental to rolling-skating or some other manly sport. He had thick lips, very new teeth, a black, Napoleonic forelock, and gold cuff-links. He carried a large amber tube containing a fragment of cigar. He was arrayed in neat, striped trousers, a boxcloth overcoat with velvet cuffs, the hat already mentioned, a white collar, and a silken tie. His button-hole was adorned by a small ornament constructed of stamped tin and affording a realistic counterfeit of the bronzed ivy leaves. He used perfume.

Victoria Alexandra observed these evidences of refinement one by one, as he approached her step by step. He came nearer . . . nearer still . . . hesitated . . . stopped . . . took off his hat. Took it *right* off. Victoria Alexandra held on to the gate-post.

The man stepped up, still holding his hat. "Pardon me, miss," he said; "excuse the question, but—is this Preece's Farm?"

"That's right," said the girl.

"Oh . . . !" sighed the stranger. "You'll

pardon me, miss, but 'ave I the pleasure to address Miss Preece ? ”

“ Yes,” said Victoria—“ I’m one on ’em.”

“ What weather for February ! ” observed the man.

“ It won’t last,” Victoria replied. She spoke at random ; her eyes were fixed upon the ivy leaves.

“ Pardon me, miss ; excuse the question,” continued the stranger, “ but could I talk to anybody—on a matter o’ business ? ”

Victoria Alexandra shook her head. “ There be’ant nobody ’ere—only me. If ’tis about the ship-sales, you might find father at the King’s ’Ead.”

“ Excuse me, miss,” responded the stranger, “ but I aint’ a-doin’ sheep. Now, pardon me, miss ; but let me ask you the question : ‘ Is your life insured ? ’ ”

Victoria Alexandra stared at his cuff-links and the ivy leaves.

“ I ’ave ’ere,” continued the stranger with gesture, producing from his pocket a sheaf of papers—blue, green, yellow, and white papers—“ I ’ave ’ere a very saucy proposal——”

Victoria Alexandra started at the word. She did not deceive herself. The strictly commercial tenor of the stranger’s utterances, if

not their exact significance, was rendered sufficiently obvious by his manner. But it was a rare word, with genteel, urbane associations. . . . She would have him repeat it.

“You got *what*?” demanded Miss Preece.

“A very special proposal, miss,” said the stranger.

“A *what*?” repeated the girl.

“A proposal,” insisted the man. “That is what we call it in the insurance business when we put it before you how advantageous it is to take advantage of the exceptional terms which we put before you. This proposal I am putting before you now is something extra ; upon me word, miss, it is a real saucy proposal, as I said before in my joking way, if you will pardon me.

“ . . . R! ’Ere we are,” pursued the stranger, selecting a pale pink document from his sheaf. “This is our proposal B. Now, miss, if you was to come in under the premium bonus section, putting you at twenty?—you can’t be *more* than twenty?—if you’ll pardon me for asking, miss.”

“Twenty—er—three, last birthday,” replied Victoria Alexandra, drawing a finger across her apron, and eyeing the indestruct-

ible emblem of persistency and hope which decorated his button-hole.

"You surprise me—if you'll pardon me for sayin' so," observed the stranger. "Now——"

"Ain't it rather cold for you out 'ere?" broke in the girl. "There's a fire inside, and I was goin' to—to make meself some tea."

"What ho!" replied the stranger.

"'Tis me own baking," murmured Victoria, a little later, when, after carefully unbuttoning his overcoat in avoidance of the possible contingencies of tea-stain or creasing, he had seated himself at the table.

"What ho!" repeated the stranger. "If," he continued, "what you tell me about your age is true—though, mind you, I can 'ardly credit it—then I'm not so sure but what our sub-section B.H. won't suit you better. You lose the bonus, but there's a very attractive cycle accident clause, and you pay the same premium as if you started at twenty, under B. What we lose on the swings we makes up on the round-about. At the same time, mind you——"

"Now, did I sugar it, or didn't I?" demanded Victoria, breaking in on the exposition.

"You didn't," stated the stranger, after investigation.

"Of course," he continued, "if anybody should 'appen to fancy a *sporting* policy, there is our Continuously Cumulative Bi-Yearly Tontine proposition. If——"

"I 'aven't got no money meself," announced Victoria at this point. "I aven't got neer a penny, on'y what lie in the Savings Bank, and father keeps the book o' that. But if you like I'll talk to father."

"Go on—will you?" cried the stranger briskly, laying down his papers and holding out his cup.

Victoria Alexandra blushed and tingled as she took it. "Saucy way you do your 'air!" she hazarded, desiring to create an uncommercial atmosphere.

"Think so?" replied the stranger. "Was you larkin', or did you mean it? Will you really put our advantages in front of your old man?"

Victoria nodded. "He is a rare one for insuring," she announced. "He got a rare belief in it. Me and me mother and the other gels and the sheep, we be all insured already. But I dessay he won't make no objections if I tells 'im as I got a fancy

to go in for it again. 'Tis me own money, anyways."

"To be sure, miss," assented the agent. "Then I'll leave the papers with you." He began to button up his overcoat.

"You'll come again, of course?" demanded Victoria Alexandra. . . . "Else I sha'n't know——"

"Of course!" exclaimed the stranger. "I'll be round 'ere this day week. No doubt you'll 'ave the form filled up be then."

"To be sure I will," replied the girl. "And," she added, with a sideways look, "it may be as I'll 'ave the teapot filled, to boot."

"What ho!" exclaimed the stranger. "But," he continued, "beggin' yere pardon, miss, if you'll excuse the question, what amount—'ow much—do you——?"

"Oh," said Victoria Alexandra, "'tis the ten-and-sixpenny lot *I'm* takin'." . . . "Saucy button-'ole you got!"

"Think so?" inquired the stranger. "It's our—I meanersay, if you'll pardon the liberty, miss, per'aps you will allow me. Ten-and-sixpence, eh? A very sound investment: a good half-guinea's worth." The stranger, as he spoke, was fumbling at his

button-hole, and, having at last detached the everlasting emblem of everlastingness, he dropped it into the hand of the girl.

"Why," cried she, in pleased astonishment, "it ain't a real bit, after all. It's——"

"A sort of 'igh-art touch," exclaimed the stranger. "Make a pritty brooch or what not."

"And you'll come again," said the girl, taking his hand in hers. "You'll come again—nex' Tuesday—for the papers."

"Thet's right," said the man.

He walked towards the door, and she followed him, carrying his hat, which she had picked up from the table.

At the gate she took his hand again. "I'll wear it in me belt," she said. "Nex' Tuesday, then. What time?"

"Any time 'tween twelve and four," replied the man. "Ow, by the way, miss, our policies take effect from the minute when I gives you the receipt for the money." He took his hat off—right off, showed his new teeth in a generous smile, pulled on his glove, and . . . she watched him turn the corner with devouring eyes.

Mr. Preece and Mo'er and the girls were duly privileged to view the 'igh-art touch

which the generous stranger had left behind him. And Mr. Preece, when the advantages of sub-section B.H. had been several times explained to him, consented gracefully enough to debit his daughter's bank-book with a cash advance of ten-and-sixpence. "'Tis worth the money," he observed, "to be quit of your durn clatter."

Next Wednesday came at last, and it was "off" day—save for Victoria Alexandra, who, displaying an unexpected solicitude for the paternal interests, stayed at home to fill and prepare the pickle-tub.

She was alone at the farm after one o'clock, and from that hour until nearly four her blue hands rested on the gate-latch.

But the stranger did not come. Nobody came—until, at last, when it wanted but three minutes to the hour, there came the sound of hoof-beats and a countrified, local fellow, riding nag-back, pulled up at the gate.

"I called for ten-and-sixpence and your 'surance paper," stated this emissary, gazing down upon her bosom, from between the third and second buttons of which protruded a pink paper.

Victoria Alexandra eyed the horseman hotly. "And who in hell be you?" said she.

“ Alf Didcott’s my name, and well bekknown to you,” replied the man. “ And I be local agent for the ‘ Friendly Grasp ’ Society, and I be called for ten-and-sixpence and yere paper.”

Victoria, watching him with sullen eyes, perceived that his button-hole was adorned with an emblem of ivy leaves fashioned in tin. “ There’s some mistake,” she said. “ There beant no ’surance papers yere.”

As for the paper at her bosom, she pushed it out of sight, and went indoors and plucked the touch of ’igh art from her waist-band and flung it in the fire.

Then she lay against the wall and looked ridiculous—with her knobs of hair and her suety face—and covered her nice eyes with the blue hands and made abominable noises.

Anon she straightened herself, went out to the pickle-tub, and moved it near to the well, and dragged up bucket after bucket of the icy water till her back ached.

XIII

MR. TRACEY AGAIN

MR. TRACEY turned up bright and early the other morning, and sharpened a lawn-mower outside my bedroom window. When he had done with the lawn-mower he found a scythe and sharpened that. When he had done with the scythe he sharpened a pair of shears ; and when he had sharpened the shears and every other cutting tool in my collection he captured an iron wheelbarrow and began to kick it.

Therefore I did that which I understand I shall in future be made to do by Act of Parliament : I got up an hour before my time and greeted Mr. Tracey from my bedroom window, which is a ground-floor window. I said :

“ Good morning, Mr. Tracey. You *are* early.”

Mr. Tracey said : “ Morgrph ! You bin gardenin’ agen, I see.”

“ Yes,” I assented, with a modest smirk, “ I did just rake over that border.”

“ When first I seed it,” observed Mr. Tracey, “ I say to meself, ‘ Ullo ! ’ I say,

'some old 'en's gone gardenin' yere.' Ain't you learned enough, then, to keep they blarsted flints away from the varges? 'Ow be I to get along with the clippin'-shears, then? Think I want to spend the 'ole day a-sharpenin', then? Won't pay you to 'ave me at that rate."

"Ah well," said I, thinking to pacify the fellow, "I know that you will earn your money however you spend the time, Mr. Tracey."

"Then think of me next time you git the fancy to goo gardenin'," responded Mr. Tracey.

Recognising that the time had come to dress, I withdrew from the window and searched for my hosiery, which, as usual, had gone to earth. Whilst I was thus employed a violent knock at the window drew my attention to that object, at which appeared the countenance of Mr. Tracey, having a highly inflamed appearance. Situated as I was, upon my hands and knees, it was not possible to offer this incursion the dignified resistance which it merited. I therefore gazed mutely upward at the dazzling splotch of sunlight and Tracey.

"I *did* think I be safe in trusting people to

keep their fingers off a doll-iron," said Mr. Tracey.

"A which?" I inquired.

"A doll-iron," repeated Mr. Tracey, adding, in a tone of increased bitterness, "and a cray-ring. They been took of and set on again, all skew-wise." Mr. Tracey rounded off his sentence with a vulgar expression, which I will not reproduce.

I continued still to gaze at Mr. Tracey with mute wonder. I did not understand the nature of his grievance.

"Be you turned blacksmith, then?" continued Mr. Tracey. "Ain't you satisfied with your talent for gardenin'?"

This was too much. I got upon my feet and confronted Mr. Tracey. "Mr. Tracey, sir," I said, "it seems to me—er—that you are forgetting yourself. Ha!"

"Pardon *me*, sir," responded Mr. Tracey, "if I do forgit myself I bean't the only one. Leastways, I do mind me own affairs. Now jest you look at that doll-iron."

I looked; and beheld a scythe in Mr. Tracey's hand. "It is a very good doll-iron," I said.

"Good?" echoed Mr. Tracey. "Of *course* it be good. Ain't you jest bought it new?"

Ain't I chose it for you ? I don't say nothing about its goodness. But did ever you see a doll-iron set as that be ? ”

“ Never,” I readily admitted.

“ I'll *lay* you never,” said Mr. Tracey. “ Now look at the cray-ring,” continued Mr. Tracey. There was a silence.

“ Well ? ” I said at length.

“ Well what ? ” demanded Mr. Tracey.

“ I am waiting for you to produce the cray-ring,” I explained.

Mr. Tracey's chronic blush became intensified. He flourished the scythe about in a menacing manner. He scowled at me.

“ Pardon me,” he finally exclaimed, suppressing with a visible struggle some inward demon—“ pardon *me*, sir, but this here be beyond a jest. Look at the set o' that crayring. Look at the *snaith*. Look at it ! ”

“ Horrible ! ” I murmured, with an artistic shudder. But, as a matter of fact, I had looked in vain.

“ Perhaps you can tell me, then, what devil it be as will not leave my scythe alone,” continued Mr. Tracey.

A light broke in upon the darkness of my

mind. "This doll-iron, this cray-ring," I accordingly said—"they have, then, some affinity to the scythe?"

Mr. Tracey glowered at me. "'Tis the scythe I be complainin' of," said Mr. Tracey. "Know a cray-ring whin you see one, don't you?"

"Of course," I answered.

"And a doll-iron?"

"Of course," I repeated.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Tracey. "Look at this snaith."

I looked.

"Never mind about that ole mole-trap there," said Mr. Tracey. "Let you set your mind on this snaith. Did you ever see a snaith that lie so skew as this be?"

"N-not for a long time," I timidly replied.

"Long time or short time, you never set eyes on a snaith as lie so wicked skew as this be. You *never* did. I'll *lay* you never did," thundered Mr. Tracey. "What do you reckon's to be done about it?"

I looked beseechingly at Mr. Tracey.

"Pardon *me*, sir," said that gentleman suddenly, "but do you know a snaith when you see one?"

“ Pardon me, sir,” I replied, “ but to tell you the truth, old friend, I *don't*.”

.

Mr. Tracey cast the scythe away from him with a passionate gesture. And, repeating the unprintable vulgarism already mentioned, he turned his back upon me and strode away.

I therefore considered that I had permission to go on dressing.

Having at last completed that operation, I breakfasted, and then felt nearly well enough to continue the dialogue with Mr. Tracey. I went out into the garden, and found Mr. Tracey engaged in uprooting a screen of Jerusalem artichokes which I had sown with my own hands.

“ This,” said Mr. Tracey, “ be pretty-mannered stuff, *I'm* sure, to go an' choke a garden with.”

“ I venture,” murmured your servant, “ to entertain a liking for that particular vegetable. I like it in soup.”

“ Maybe,” assented Mr. Tracey, “ 'tis very good stuff in soup ; but 'tis certainly no use in a garden—leastways, not in a *gentleman's* garden : though that, I will own, is a thing as be difficult to find in these days. Why, bless

my soul, sir, there be scarcely a common cow-man in all Sussex as would leave set such clumberin' tackle as this be. 'Tis the ugliest-mannered stuff as was ever dug in."

"Well, Mr. Tracey," I cooed, "do as you please."

"Pardon *me*, sir," responded Mr. Tracey ; "'tis as *you* please. But if ever I have anything to do with a garden that have got to look shipshape, that ain't got to have no sich clumberin', ugly-mannered tackle as this in it. 'Tis as you please, sir ; but if I got to take the responsibility for this garden, then, damme, I'll 'ave it as I want it. . . . Many's the time I've said as much to Major-General Tinker."

These were brave words, I told myself, and should be accepted joyfully. I accordingly retired to an obscure end of the garden and rejoiced hard. When I thought it safe to coo again I complimented Mr. Tracey upon the quaint and original scarecrow which he had constructed in the vicinity of the beans.

"Yes," said Mr. Tracey, "we ain't got nothing to do in these days on to sit down and think out funny scarecrows. To amuse the boobies," he added.

I felt that Mr. Tracey was getting "hot," as they say when you look for the thimble.

I changed the subject. "How many rows of butter-beans did you put down?" I smoothly inquired.

"Guess," said Mr. Tracey archly.

I guessed four.

"No," said Mr. Tracey.

"Five?"

"No," repeated Mr. Tracey. "'Tis no good going on, young man," he added. "You won't never guess it. Truth o' the matter is that I aren't planted none o' they damn things."

"But," I expostulated, "you were told to do so. And I gave you the seeds."

"And," said Mr. Tracey, "I throwed the blarsted things away. What be the good of puttin' in sich ugly-mannered, noo-fangled truck as that be? What's the matter with a scarlet runner? Can you beat a scarlet runner? Did ever your father eat a button-bean, or whatever 'tis you call the funny thing? No—nor mine neither. Scarlet runners was good enough for them. A proper scarlet runner, properly growed, properly cooked, that will beat all your new-fangled, ugly-mannered American truck. Major-General Tinker, 'e would 'a died afore 'e'd eat a button-bean."

"Tell me this, Mr. Tracey," I said: "Have

you ever seen a butter-bean in all your life ? Don't mind owning up, you know. They are very little known in England."

"Pardon *me*, sir," responded Mr. Tracey, "but tell me this : Can you beat a scarlet runner ?"

"You can," I said ; "and with a butter-bean. They have got to be planted."

"Sir," said Mr. Tracey, "you can't ; and they won't be planted. Not in my garden."

I do not know what I should have said next to Mr. Tracey ; but a shrill hail from the neighbourhood of the garden gate called me to that quarter, where I found old Mrs. Turner in her old pony-carriage.

"I have come to know whether you can possibly do without Mr. Tracey to-morrow," said old Mrs. Turner ; "I so badly want him to trim my hedges."

"I am sorry," I replied, "but I cannot possibly spare him. I've booked him for three days, and I shall want him every minute."

"Dear me," said old Mrs. Turner, "such an invaluable man, is he not ?"

"He is," I said.

"So much sought after," continued old Mrs. Turner.

I nodded.

“ I shall have to wait till Friday, then ? ” asked Mrs. Turner plaintively.

“ I *may* be able to let him go after two on Thursday,” I replied, “ but don’t depend on that doubtful possibility. I find it so difficult to part with Tracey when once I get him here.”

“ I can quite believe it,” said old Mrs. Turner kindly. “ So capable and cheerful and polite and obliging, is he not ? ”

This was more than I could stand. I looked very solemnly at old Mrs. Turner.

Old Mrs. Turner looked solemnly at me.

“ *For a gardener, I mean,*” she explained at last.

XIV

ARCADY

ETHEL MARY PARKER is commonly regarded as the "belle" of this village, an opinion which I do not share. I hold that there is far too much of Ethel Mary; too much figure, too much eyelash, too much complexion, too much smile, and, above all, too much—affability.

At the same time I will admit that her hair, which is the colour of old red ale, is beautiful hair; I will admit that she is a beautiful person, if you can persuade your eye to comprehend her all at once, just as an election poster is beautiful—if you can persuade your eye to comprehend it all at once. And she certainly has an irresistible way with pigs.

I saw her lately doing thus to a pig, while the famished January sunshine warmed itself in her hair. She was holding the pig—a broad, and loud, and lusty pig—by its irresponsive tail and hammering it simultaneously with a stout deal board. Benny Crow, who helps the village choir with the loudest and nethermost G in five parishes, stood by Ethel's side, hold-

ing in one fat hand a portion of that lady's waist-line, and in the other a sharp steel knife. Their concerted efforts were addressed to the problem of getting their pig to the killing-trough. Said Ethel :

"Give over. I tell ye there's a pin in moi belt. 'Tis luck Oi cotched th' oold daval. 'E would a' runned into the rood if Oi 'eddent a' cotched 'im."

"Oi'll chanst the pin," responded Benjamin, with gallantry and in his fullest G. "This oold bloke would never a' got to the rood. They faggots be theer to stop 'im."

"They sticks theer!" cried Ethel derisively. "'E'd a' shoved they things asunder in two seconds. You've a-found the pin, Oi see."

"Yes," assented Benny, carefully licking his finger. "Oi be good at findin' trouble." He flung his great arm suddenly about her neck, and tugging her face towards him, kissed her flaunting lips.

"Simminly," said Ethel, as she cuffed his grimy ear—with a certain tenderness, however. "Tennerate," added Miss Parker, "that don't sim as you be very well able to 'old a pig."

"I kin 'old what Oi've a mind to," answered Benny. He took her big, red hand in his own

big hand and wrenched it away from the pig's tail ; he put the knife between his teeth ; he seized the pig's tail with his other hand and twisted it steadily. The pig squealed. You might suppose that pigs were human beings, born without a sense of humour, to hear how piteously he squealed.

Ethel Mary Parker saw the joke, and laughed. "'Ark at the silly bleater!" she exclaimed. "'E say 'Wee! Wee!'" She jabbed at his helpless, billowy flanks with her hunk of deal.

"Oo wee! Oo wee! Oo wee!" exclaimed the silly pig.

"Wee, wee, wee!" cried Ethel Mary, mocking him.

Mr. Crow surveyed the deed approvingly. "That'll bring out 'is dimples," he remarked.

"Hee, hee!" cried Ethel.

"Haw, haw!" cried Mr. Crow.

"What be *you* a-laughin' at?" Ethel then demanded unexpectedly. "'E be your master, any rood."

"That theer pig?" questioned Benny.

Ethel nodded, a gleam as of gaiety in her eye.

Mr. Crow released her hand. Still twisting the beast's tail, he performed some sort of somersault, some stratagem, the technique of

which would perhaps have been admired by those who kill pigs. And in a moment he had this stupid animal by the ring which was affixed to his snout.

He tugged at the ring triumphantly—victoriously—contemptuously. Ethel Mary, doubting no longer, applied her strong hands to the tail part, imitating Mr. Crow's performance very creditably. In a very few moments they had him at the killing-trough.

In another few moments Benny had him prostrate, bound, and helpless.

"Wee, wee, wee!" cried Ethel. "'Ark at the bleater!"

"'Oo be master *now*?" demanded Mr. Crow, as he tugged her flushed face towards him.

"Get away with ye, y' ugly great beast," responded Ethel, resting her head contentedly upon his shoulder.

When they had fondled thus for some minutes, Mr. Crow released her and went back for his sharp knife, which he had cast upon the ground.

At the same moment your servant was seized with a notion to take walking exercise. He walked, and walked, and walked for several minutes—or was it hours?—or was it days?—until he came to a copse by the side

of a little stream, where was also an old stone bridge. And upon the parapet of this bridge sat our future Squire, young Mr. Smith, from the 'All, who had blood upon his gaiters, and blood upon his boots, and blood upon his coat, all of which proceeded from two dead rabbits, which were hanging now across his shoulders.

Seeing this, your servant was taken with another notion—to turn about and walk the way he had come.

He walked, and walked, and walked, while young Mr. Smith (from the 'All) walked, and walked, and walked also ; crying at intervals, " Here, I say, old chap : Hi ! Tally-ho ! "

By the time I got back to Benny and Ethel again, young Mr. Smith had walked me down.

The pig was still squealing ; but so faintly as to make it evident that Mr. Crow had done that which was to do. And Mr. Crow (whose clothes and figure were wet with other evidence) sat upon a style with Ethel's arms around his neck.

Mr. Smith, who now was walking level with me, shifted his dripping burden from one shoulder to the other, and spoke, saying, with a good-natured laugh :

" I say, old man, some people have curious ideahs of enjoyment—what ? "

XV

A MATTER OF SHEEP

MR. WILL JUDKINS, accompanied by a pitchfork, sat on the stile at Three Gates Bottom and welcomed in the spring. "Here and there and then," said Mr. Judkins.

Mr. Judkins being a husbandman of lofty character, I marvelled somewhat at these words.

"What a lovely morning it is, to be sure, Mr. Judkins, sir," I said. "Quite spring-like!"

"What say, young man?" queried Mr. Judkins.

I looked at the sky, which was like unto some infinite fairy sea, with ships o' sail at voyage upon its distant marge—great galleon ships with bellying sails of fine-spun silk. And I looked upon the orchard at Mr. Judkins's back, behind the gate, and there were bright green catkins on the nut stems; and underneath a cherry tree three little wild-sown crocuses were bursting into splendour.

"I said," remarked your servant, "that it

is wonderful weather for March. Quite spring-like."

"~~How~~ the weather," said Mr. Judkins.

"But listen to that lark, sir," I protested.

"They larks," mused Mr. Judkins, his kind white beard majestically floating in the sunlight, "they be the damndest rascals as ever cursed a poor man on his land."

"But they *can* sing!" I suggested.

"Sing!" reiterated Mr. Judkins. "And who the ~~sheep~~ has got the time for singin'? Moi ewes be arl broke loose."

"A scamper in the sunlight will do them good," I ventured to point out.

Mr. Judkins dismounted from his stile and eyed me with a weary eye. "You be a simpleton, Oi think," he said.

"It is the sunshine," I explained. "Makes one feel so gay and careless. Don't you find the same yourself?"

Mr. Judkins plucked a catkin and broke it with his fingers. "Moi sheep," he pursued, "be arl broke loose. Their pens be arl to blazes. Theer's a day's work settin' they darned hurdles roight. And do you suppose as ever Oi kin foind me ere a man to droive they sheep back 'oomagin? Theer's six or seven o' moi best ewes, wi' lambs at foot, as be loose

in Goddard's Piece beyant the roise theer ; theer's fower oold besoms and eight young lambs be scrufflin' up moi winter oats be'oind ye theer ; and theer's moi oold black ewe—the one's Oi 'ahd from the Squire 'isself, thaht be broke into moi brother's orchard, 'im an' me not talkin' an' all ! An' yare be yew a-talkin' o' the spring. ' *Now* the spring ! ' Oi say.

" Theer's our young Will 'as be sot among the bird-pens at this very minute. Wi' a concertina in 'is 'and an' a tuppenny cigar between 'is chops, an' a grin all oover 'im as would stretch from yare to Petterling. ' Our sheep be arl broke loose,' says Oi to 'im ; ' so stop this mad-brained foolin', do,' says Oi. ' What for ? ' says 'e. ' To droive 'em 'oom, ye long-nosed puppy,' Oi ses. ' Tut,' says 'e, the long-nosed puppy. ' Tut ! ' says 'e, to 'is father's face. ' Oi be larnin' a song for the 'arvest-'oom.' *Larnin' a song for the 'arvest-'oom*, darg boite 'im. An' us be still in March.

" Then theer be Septimus, our dung-cart boy. Do ye thenk Oi kin foind that davilish lad ? 'E be oover to the dairy a-rackenin' to larn my darter Kate make curds or some sich Devonsheer foolery, same's they eat abroad. An' do you thenk Oi kin foind moi darter

Kate? That gigglin' baggage, she be in the dairy along o' Septimus!

"An' moi eldest darter Susan, 'er as be thaht fond o' Boible-study, Oi *did* thenk as what a maiden of 'er age an' 'omely looks could be depended on. But bless ye, no! The arkid fool be rood to Petterling in a egg-cart along of 'Arry Dukes, the 'iggler's son. Whoi, even me married darter Jane—'er as Oi did believe to own some sense at one toime—she be busy wi' a child-birth. . . . And theer's moi sheep be arl broke loose."

"But it is a beautiful spring morning," I pointed out.

"~~Barra and Barra and Barra!~~" said Mr. Judkins. "Theer's moi black ewe be broke into Tom Judkin's medder, an' 'im an' me not talkin'."

"And," I added, "there is a plump little woman at the cross-roads waving a little hand at you."

"Drat the women," said Mr. Judkins. "'Ow'll Oi get moi sheep 'oom?"

"Why," quoth I, taking pity upon the man in his despair, "why, Mr. Judkins, sir, seeing that the spring has come, I think that *I* will help you drive the sheep home. Unless that lady there should be your daughter Susan."

In which case I daresay you would prefer that *she* should——”

“Go’ bless my soul!” interpolated Mr. Judkins, shading his venerable eyebrows to inspect. “That be the Widder Mockley. An’ wavin’ me and arl!”

“In the matter of these sheep, now,” I continued: “Supposing that I skirt the hedge there, along by Goddard’s Piece, while you stop here at the stile and wait until I drive the sheep from——”

“~~Drive~~ the sheep,” said Mr. Judkins. “Thaht be the Widder Mockley. Go’ bless moi soul. An’ me so muddied up an’ arl. An’ she a-wavin’ to me. Go’ bless moi soul.”

Mr. Judkins threw aside his pitchfork and started up the road.

“Ba-a-a-a-a!” remarked a middle-aged sheep in Goddard’s Piece.

XVI

THE HERITAGE APPOINTED

THAT which first of all attracted me to a little old lady who walked towards me along the High Street of Petterling was the remarkable red cap wherewith her head was geared. I knew the cap at once, and by that token knew its wearer. This woollen cap is the accepted regalia of Unity Pyke, our blind woman.

It surprised me to see her making forth so very early of an autumn morning. It surprised me to mark the ease and directness of her gait, which is the marvel of Petterling. She does not tap her way : she does not even feel for it.

Unity is an especial and particular crony of mine. We have drunk tea and perused the Scriptures in company. Those passages from the Old Testament which she particularly favours are they which have traffic with war and love. Which is so much as to say that she favours the entire literature of Israel. Upon the other hand, one must except from her regard such narratives, however engaging, which have a purely visual basis. It is of no

use seeking to interest her with the tale of Solomon and his glory. How should poor Unity rejoice for that he builded unto the Lord a temple having a blue and purple veil, upon which cherubims were broidered ? The soul of Unity is windowless, and blue and purple are to her expressions only, like " tall " or " thin," and " light " and " dark." Also (unlike the fortunate reader), she would not recognise a cherubim if she met one ; and as for the lilies which are more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory, any reference to *them* serves merely to conjure up recollections of a faint and nauseous smell.

" Pray ! Thaht's good ! " she asserted only yesterday, when I had finished the account of Samson and his remarkable find of honey in the carcase of a lion. The lion represented a definite idea to her, you see, for she had heard one roar in the early nineties, when the distinguished Mr. Wombwell came to Petterling. " Moi ! I do tramble yet, o' noights, to thenk on it ! " As for honey—why, a jar of that stimulating confection is Unity's traditional legacy from the harvest thanksgivers at Petterling Church. " An' pray," says Unity, " they bees be nisy creators wi' their purrin' an' that o' sunny days."

I told you, didn't I, that she favoured the love passages of Scripture? I will tell you again, then : for thereby hangs a tale.

Thereby hangs a tale : and although it has really nothing to do with the fact which I set out to record, I will postpone that anecdote a little longer, and tell you Unity's tale.

It began with her birth ; for she was born blind. And some people are of opinion that much may be forgiven to them that walk in darkness. This, however, was not the view of the gentleman who ruled over Petterling as squire when Unity was young. For he was a godly squire. He held the belief that acts which were bad acts in persons completely supplied with their senses and faculties became transformed into sins of an indescribable and unforgivable character when practised by the afflicted. This, anyhow, is the standard of judgment which he applied to Unity—he and his dear, good maiden sister, whose virtues and excellencies are so eloquently described upon the handsome marble urn which perpetuates her memory in Petterling Church.

It was like this, you see. Unity's mother, being London bred, as Unity herself has told me, proved herself unequal to the efforts involved in her association with Unity's birth.

So that Unity came into this world not only without eyes of her own, but also without the aid of those fond eyes which might have helped to pierce the mists for her. And Unity's father, who worked in the fields, worked himself into an illness which terminated fatally when Unity had reached the aggravatingly neutral age of sixteen years. So that *something*, obviously, had to be done.

Now, the Parson did not see what he could do. There was the coal fund, and the blanket fund, and Dame Pattigrew's fund for ten poor widows of this parish. But even a blind girl cannot subsist entirely on coals and blankets ; and as for Dame Pattigrew's bequest, the terms of that document were inexorable. And the other small funds available for purposes of charity had been ear-marked months ago. Besides which, observed the reverend gentleman, there was a something called "precedent" which really *must* be respected. But what about the Guardians ?

The Guardians really did not see what *they* could do. Those gentlemen expressed themselves as being more than eager to welcome poor Unity as a permanent resident of their workhouse. But that institution, admirably conducted though it was, could offer nothing

to its guests beyond a routine existence of the most rigorous monotony. Than this, they suggested, some more kindly haven might be found for a creature so young and lonely as this poor child. Out-relief? That question the honourable board would be pleased to consider upon its merits. A contribution not exceeding two shillings weekly could be definitely promised, and it *might* be that they could see their way to granting a princely dole of double that sum. Powerful influences were, indeed, at work to that end. Beyond this, they could do nothing. Their powers were limited, they said. And it must further be remembered that public benefactions were necessarily governed by a factor termed precedent—an element which at all costs must be regarded.

Then the friends of little Unity (the poor and the afflicted had their friends in Petterling fifty years ago, even as to-day): these friends, I say, then played their final card. They brushed their hats, and wiped their feet, and called upon their worthy Squire and that worthy dame, his sister.

That gentleman, as became a patriarch and a Christian, met the situation nobly. He really did not see that there was *much* which

he could do ; but that much he would do, with a Christian gladness in the deed. The deputation had pointed out that there were many claims upon his purse : it therefore was unnecessary for him to say anything further upon that point. The deputation had also pointed out that Unity's forbears had worked upon his farms for several generations. In recognition of that fact, he had arranged with his dear sister to provide the young woman with a two-roomed cottage on the estate, which residence she might occupy free of cost. Also, he had used his influence with the Guardians to procure the young woman a sum in out-relief amounting to four shillings weekly. Over and above these acts of charity, he proposed, in evidence of Christian pity, and in recognition of the duties attaching to the situation of life wherein it had pleased the Almighty to place him, to give the girl from his privy purse an additional pension of four shillings weekly. He would also make it his especial care to see that she was taught the rudiments of some trade compatible with her unfortunate condition. He suggested basket-making. The deputation warmly endorsed that suggestion, as warmly thanked his Squireship, and withdrew.

So Unity, having been saved from the terrors of a workhouse existence, was pleasantly installed within the cottage aforesaid, where it was confidently expected that she would conduct herself appropriately, weaving rushes, and praising God, and thinking of her blessedness. Instead of which—instead of which——

Well, she conducted herself appropriately enough for a year or so. She attended the morning service and the evensong every Sunday at the church. She went to all the Bible-classes. She spent the long days and the long, long nights alone within her hovel, finding (one is to suppose) much peace and consolation *and* entertainment in the various reflections which naturally must fill the mind of a blind girl of her age. Besides, there was the weekly visit to look forward to of the Squire's exemplary sister.

I imagine poor old Unity at this period of her life (did I say that she is nearly seventy now ?), I imagine her at this period, I say, as having been a fresh, little, dark-haired maiden of Quaker habit. I know that she must have been beautiful, because *all* young things are beautiful. And I can imagine this poor bound soul alone in the dark with its toil and its

thoughts—half-formed thoughts, half-formed memories, half-formed wishes. Nothing real about her or within her, nothing save the darkness. And I can imagine, therefore, how it was that—that——

Yes! They found Jack Munsey in her cottage. They found him in the night. And so, in the name of Christ, whose name they give to all their wickedness—that Christ who forgave a woman that was not blind for sins beside which this sin of Unity's was pure and white—in the name of this God, I say, they seized her sightless, wondering soul, and threw it, a sacrifice, to those bloody wolves which they called their virtue.

They took her cottage from her, look you. And the Squire and his sister—whose eminent Talents, Christian Virtue, unaffected Piety, and the rest of it are to this day advertised in Petterling Church—withdrew their weekly pension from the girl. So that all which was left to her was the meagre stipend contributed by public charity. And as she could not possibly exist upon that sum, she went to live with Jack. And then the stipend was withdrawn.

And Jack, he very soon grew tired of her. They are poor company, these puling blind

girls, to your lads of mettle. She lacked nothing of submissiveness, which, of course, caused Mr. Munsey to hanker after its opposite, a spirit which he endeavoured to propagate (in an evil moment) by means of a strap. Which proceeding resulted in Jack being badly seized by a disease which he termed the 'orrors. There was a look, he said, come into her senseless eyes what looked like no other look you ever see ; and it followed him to work, and pursued him into tap-rooms, and presided over his dreams, so that he 'listed for a soldier, and got shot outside Sebastopol.

Then, being blind and helpless and sinful, but chiefly sinful, and, consequently, outside the pale of Christian kindness, there was nought for Unity to do but look out for another Jack, whom she found in the person of Hallelujah Mockley, Jack's bosom friend. When Hallelujah tired of her, which he did speedily by reason of being taken with a complaint very similar to that which afflicted Jack, there was the workhouse and there was infamy. And Unity had tasted infamy ; but the workhouse was an unknown horror, which contorted itself variously in that numb blackness which was her mind.

So Unity chose the peril which she knew, and sold a little basketwork as well : she lived, let us say, by the sale of merchandise. And year succeeded year, and still she lived, to be reviled and spat upon by little children whom she could not see. But presently the velvet pallor of her cheek changed into a rusty drab, and the wrinkles came, and her lips grew dry, so that nought remained which might atone for the horror of sinful eyes which could not see.

She still could weave her grasses, to be sure ; but a somewhat godly race of husbandmen was come into that countryside, who hesitated to buy their gear from one so thickly steeped in mire as Unity. And people do not keep their dustbins out of doors in Petterling ; so that much in the nature of food and foot-gear and saleable bottle-ware was denied to her. And she could not see to steal big things.

Wherefore, at last, that vague, incalculable horror of the workhouse had to be proved, and experienced, and endured. I remember, years ago, to have seen the little town's children stop before the workhouse gates to jeer, and hoot, and stick forth their tongues at Old

Blind Unity the wanton, as she sunned herself within the workhouse close.

But then, a little while ago, there came to live near Petterling a ribald gentleman having wealth, who hated virtue and denied the God of virtue: who haled forth Unity from the workhouse, and established her within a cottage of his own, and pensioned her, and goaded the Guardians into doing likewise.

So that Unity hath her sinful ease at last. She has honey from the church, as I have said; and is acquainted with persons of substance, and with others who have merits of a higher character, such as may be comprised in an undoubted gift for Scripture reading.

And I think that she is really fallen into a sort of happiness—a gentle twilight of repose, spectreless and somnolent. I could wish that the young maids of the village would be kinder to her. They and the matrons are virtue-ridden, as of yore. But the little children and the old, old folk, *they* have tolerance, which is to say that they have pity and they have love. So that Unity Pyke hears voices in her twilight.

But, as I said at the beginning of this paper, it surprised me to see her walking out so very early of this autumn morning. Unity lies

usually a-bed till close upon midday. She is seventy, and wicked.

But when I had hailed her, and inquired the reason for this unwonted and injurious activity, I fell to wondering even more.

“ Oi be gine to charch,” says Unity.

“ *Church!* ” I echoed. “ At this hour of a workday morning ! ”

Unity, with a bunch of her lips and something that was almost a gleam in those pitiful eyes, withered me into silence.

“ Pray ! ” says this creature then, this flower so sweetly nurtured by our Church and State, “ pray, now,” says she, “ this be King Edward’s birthday, to be shower—Gard blass ’um ! ”

XVII

THE SABBATARIANS

I TELL this tale in simple Christian faith, as it was told to me.

I had it from an educated stranger—a quiet, drunken man—whom I found by a brook upon a hill-side in Sussex. He had removed his footgear and was laving his feet within the running water. He was also smoking a stout cigar, and laughing and crying to himself.

He was a well-brushed, tidy, middle-aged man of gentlemanly address, and was mourning, with restraint and dignity, to a depth of not more than two inches of neat *crêpe*, for his wife's aunt. This gentleman offered me a grave but courteous greeting, and made room for my feet in the brook, introducing himself as Mr. Andrew Bellchambers, of Coleman Street, E.C. He said to me :

“ You, too, have lunched, perhaps ? ”

I shook my head—a little sadly, it may be ; for the way had been long, over clay soil, and a Sabbath thirst and hunger were upon me.

“ Ah ! ” said the stranger, “ I *have* lunch-ed.” His utterance was extremely clear. Had I trusted solely to my senses of sight and hearing, it might never have been made manifest to me how well he had lunched. But I sat to leeward of him. “ My God ! ” he continued, “ I have thrice lunched.”

I sighed.

“ But, sir,” continued the stranger, “ this cooling stream, combined with the amble from Blowfield, has so refreshed me that I could lunch again. You have a clean and ingenuous countenance. Come to Blowfield and lunch with me.”

“ Indeed, sir,” said your servant, “ I am bound for Blowfield and lunch ; but——”

“ I will not be refused,” said my strange companion. “ The King’s Arms ? ”

I nodded.

“ A well-kept, substantial house,” said the stranger authoritatively. “ I have just lunched there. I want some more lunch now. I beg that you will be my guest. There is a fore-quarter of lamb, the mutilated fragments of which will perhaps respond to an encore. There is mint sauce and a middle-aged Stilton ; there is Perrier Jouet rising eight. I really cannot be denied your company.”

“ But really——” I protested. Mr. Bellchambers, who by this time had donned his boots, hushed me with a gesture of dignified remonstrance.

“ Do not argue, *please*,” he exclaimed. “ You interfere with my Sabbath peace. I know you do not know me ; but then I do not know you. We have met, as it were, by chance. Let us lunch, as it were, by grave and judicious design. I happen to be rich this morning, and lonely ; the friend who came with me to Blowfield is young and delicate. He has succumbed. He lies on a sofa at the King’s Arms sleeping the Sabbath sleep. He is young, and crude, and shy ; he lacks experience ; he is immature. He slumbers. Now do be kind, and take his place.”

“ Well, sir,” I responded, “ since you——”

“ That is right,” my new friend interposed. “ That is spoken friendly. Your arm, sir.

“ You are perhaps acquainted, sir—steady now, steady ! ” continued Mr. Bellchambers, taking my arm, “ you are perhaps acquainted with a short cut to Blowfield ? Excellent ! Excellent !! I do so want my lunch.

“ I happen to be rich to-day,” repeated

the stranger. "Rich in gold and rich in happiness. I have in my pocket, sir—steady now, steady!—I have—or had—in my pocket ecclesiastical funds to the value of eight pounds thirteen shillings and tenpence. But oh, my dear young man, of what value is mere money when unaccompanied by spiritual riches? The difference between our respective ages entitles me, I think, to address you—do keep steady, dammit!—to address you in these fatherly terms.

"I am this day rich beyond all counting. I have lunched—thrice lunched—and I propose to lunch again. Also, I have attended morning song. Mark you that, young man?"

The stranger chuckled reverently within his beard.

"What perfect weather!" he exclaimed. "April, do you say? It is more like June. Behold that cloudless sky. Behold the Sabbath calm. And tell me, tell me candidly (for you are now my friend), are these Sussex meadows permanently subject to seismic tremors? I seem to be walking on a blasted earthquake. That is a charming little church at Pucklefield, by the way. St. Michael's, I think they call it—or is it St. Mary's? Late Perpendicular, with

Liberty pews. It was there I attended morning song. Do you conform to the established faith? Skirt that mole-hill, please."

I replied to Mr. Bellchambers's inquiry and responded to his request. After we had made the *détour*, and I had picked up his hat and dusted it, he said :

" Well, well ! It is perhaps unreasonable to look for spiritual fervour in the young. Upon the other hand, had you shared in our experiences of this morning—sh : who knows !

" I did not, let me confess it, attend the morning song at St. Thingummy's of set or deliberate purpose. We went there, really, to get out of the sun. We sat in the hallowed porch, my friend and I, and listened to the organ's solemn peal. Have you ever observed, young man, that there is a chipped tile upon the porch of St. Anthony's ? "

I admitted to Mr. Bellchambers that I had never even seen the parish porch at Pucklefield.

Mr. Bellchambers sighed. " Well, well ! " he mused ; " it is no wonder that you stagger so. Try to walk steadily, or you will spoil my lunch. The friend of my manhood—he

who now slumbers at the Blowfield inn—directed my attention to the chipped tile, and also to a little patch of light, the counterpart of this hole in the roof of St. Peter's porch : a little circular patch of light cast by the intrusive sun upon the shadowed pavement of St. Peter's porch. It fascinated one, this disc of light upon those purple, age-worn stones."

I nodded appreciatively.

"A disc of light," continued Mr. Bell-chambers. "Just that ! About the size of a halfpenny. My friend, who now sleeps, had in his ticket-pocket nearly a shillings-worth of copper coins, and I but two pennies. I won his all, however, in less than three minutes. You are perhaps acquainted with the game of Shove Ha'-penny ? Of course. But, ah, my young friend, you have never played it to an organ accompaniment ! I can assure you that without church music the game loses much of its sacerdotal charm.

"They were playing the last hymn ('Lead, Kindly Light') and the music was accompanied by a sort of under-theme of chink : for, as you doubtless know, it is the custom in our Anglican churches to take the offertory during the last hymn.

“The notes of the organ,” continued Mr. Bellchambers, “were dying away on the last line of the last verse when I gathered in my young friend’s last halfpenny. And then a strange thing happened. The great doors of the church were slowly opened, and—— Tell me, young man, is it my fancy, or are you swaying from one side of the road to the other? You are not. Then I apologise.

“The great doors of the church, which were situated within the porch, were slowly opened, I say, and we beheld—— Surely that building with Jacobean chimneys beyond the copse there is our inn? Aha! I thought so! Begad, I am hungry. I was saying that the great doors of the church were slowly opened, to the space of about a foot; and peering cautiously through the opening, we beheld the face and whiskers of a grave churchwarden. He held in his hand a bag of purple velvet. He regarded us at first with an expression of severity, mixed with wonder; then a gleam as of battle shone forth from his eyes, and placing his hand within the bag of purple velvet, he brought forth a penny and flung it towards the disc. At once I covered it. Once more he dug into the purple

bag : once more brought forth a penny and flung it at the disc : once more I covered it !

“ Then we beheld—it is good to think that we have so nearly reached our destination. I really could not keep step with your extraordinary gait for many additional yards. Where was I ?

“ Ah yes, we then beheld a second face, that of a second churchwarden—a blue-chinned gentleman with a legal sneer, who also carried a velvet bag. He did not share in his companion’s hesitancy, but joined the game at once, and I almost immediately had the pleasure of covering five several florins, culled from his little bag of purple velvet. And the first notes of a fine voluntary welled forth from the chancel. It was most impressive.

“ And here we are. Pray walk steadily up these convulsive steps. They ought to be held down.

“ It was, as I say, sir, *most* impressive. We won the whole collection.”

XVIII

ANOTHER MRS. TANQUERAY

WE met. 'Twas in a lane. She stood without the wicket of a little beam-and-plaster cottage. And I spoke to her baby, and admired the dog, and cadged a bunch of snowdrops. She was a pink-faced, smiling creature.

So we gossiped.

"Your first?" I inquired, alluding to her baby. The woman laughed.

"Pray, no!" she answered; but this exclamation was not uttered in the proper manner. She spoke it as they might speak in Lambeth—a sort of yelp, quite different from the slow, reflective, almost devotional drawl which people use in these parts. "Pray, no!" she said. "'Im's my third, young fellar!"

Then I knew for certain that she was a Cockney. The native women do not call you "young fellar."

"Yes, young fellar," she repeated, "'im's my third. The uvver two was still-born. Gals, they was. This 'ere's a boy."

“ And a very fine boy, too ! ” I ventured to observe.

“ Well,” responded the lady, “ ’e don’t take after ’is father. That’s one thing ! ”

“ Father weakly ? ” I suggested.

“ Strong enough,” explained the lady, “ but dull. One of them obligin’, kind-’earted blokes as saves their money. One of them cow-sperited sort. My boy ’ere (Flop, we call ’im, arter my man’s prize rabbit, what died), ’e takes arter ’is granfer. My father as was. ’E was one of the right sort, ’e was. No keepin’ bees an’ that about ’im. There’s a fishmonger in Wandsworth as wears a wooden finger to this day through speakin’ disrespectful to my father. There was five-an’-forty people come to pay their respects to my father’s body when we buried ’im. It wasn’t ’arf a funell, *I* can tell you. Cost a ’eap o’ money.”

“ The—er—event,” I hazarded, “ took place in London, of course ? ”

“ What do *you* think ? ” replied my hostess. “ They don’t ’ave no funells ’ere—not to say *funells*. They do’ know what the word means, not in these parts. Lot o’ savages, they are. Set ’em to lay a farrit or poach a pheasant an’ they’ll do you prahd ; but when it comes to a

bit o' *sport*—lar lumme, the men round these parts they *ain't* men at all. Don't know the meanin' of sport no more than my boy there—bless 'im.

"I'll see as 'e don't grow up to be no bloomin' countryman. You're a Londoner yeself, no doubt, young fellar, an' so you'll understand. Fancy my ole father's gran'son 'oein' fields! I'd sooner see 'im 'listed! We'll make a barman of ums, wown't we, ducksie, or else a commission agent's assistant, sames's granfer. Didums want to be a man like granfer, then? And so ums shall. Or a sodejer like um's Uncle Fred, an' slap um's leg? Or a gent like Uncle Alf, an' 'awk 'addicks? Blessum's pleadin' 'eart, then!"

"If I thought," said she, "as my boy 'ere was a-goin' to grow up into a silly, well-be-'aved man like 'is father, I think as I would run away. Not as I ain't so sure as I *won't* do it, even now!"

"Run away from your husband!" I exclaimed, shocked to the uttermost depths of a pure and sensitive nature. "That would be a fearfully stuck-up sort of thing to do. He can't *help* being unworthy of you, you know."

"That's as it may be," admitted Mrs. Dudman (I had elicited her name at an earlier

stage of this discussion). “ That’s as it may be. I ain’t sayin’ nothink about *that*. But ’e can ’elp gardenin’ all ’is spare time, can’t ’e ? An’ tellin’ you what Ole Moore ’as got to say about the day arter to-morrow, if ever you so much as mention it. Ole Moore’s ’is ’obby. If it ain’t the King what’s gointer ’ave a illness, or the blowing up of London Bridge, it’s a certain failure of the potato crop ; an’ if ’tain’t that, then there’s gointer be a million people die off with smallpox. An’ there’s never not a single item ’as come off yet. I always tell ’im, I says : ‘ You don’t ’ave no luck, you don’t.’

“ An’ so ’e goes on. An’ talk of j’alousy—’e’s that j’alous, believe me or not, as you please, young fellar, that when ’e seed me a-settin’ up Peach Lane on my sister’s ’usband’s knee—’avin’ a game, as you might say, to make believe we was spoonin’—up ’e comes, a dreadful great mallet in ’is ’and, an’ boshes my sister’s ’usband aside the ’ead—’im an’ my sister bein’ guests at our place at the time.

“ ‘ What you stunned ’im for, you clumsy owl ? ’ I says to ’im.

“ ‘ For makin’ too free wi’ my wife,’ says ’e ; ‘ an’ if it ’appens agen I’ll kill ’im.’

“ ‘ Your wife ? ’ I says to ’im : ‘ *your wife* ? ’ Is sister-in-lor,’ I says. ‘ That’s what you mean. If you *must* be spiteful, go ’ome, an’ play make-believes with Hemma,’ I says—Hemma bein’ my sister. ‘ We’re all one family, ain’t we ? ’ I says. ‘ You narrow-minded, ignorant navvy,’ I says, ‘ go ’ome, an’ learn manners.’

“ Wi’ that, ’e crawls away an’ sulks.

“ That’s the kind o’ man ’e is. Cow-sperited. I’ll ’ave to leave ’im one o’ these fine days. I know I shall. Then we’ll see some life.”

“ Who will ? ” I inquired.

“ Me an’ my boy,” replied the woman.

“ Where ? ”

“ In London—Walworth or thereabouts. That’s my ’ome ! ”

“ See some life in Walworth ! What next, I wonder ? ”

“ Where else,” responded Mrs. Dudman, “ would you ’ave me see it ? ’Ere in Petterling ? ”

That, of course, was my case. I drew the attention of Mrs. Dudman to the January sun, and the sky, and the mackerel clouds that hung there. I directed her notice to the hills, and the elm trees, already heavy with their

burden of little, urgent buds, which gave a look of redness to the distant woods ; and to the first green shoots of corn upon a meadow, and to sheep and a shepherd, and to many similar features of the landscape. And I reminded her that snowdrops do not blow in Walworth, nor even cabbages. And that as for gardens—why, working-folk in Walworth cannot even rent a house, but must make shift, often, with a single room. “ See life ? ” I concluded. “ Why, life doesn’t exist at all for people like you—in Walworth.”

“ I’d like to know,” said Mrs. Dudman calmly, “ what life you reckon is goin’ on round ’ere ? ”

I accordingly reckoned ; and my reckoning amounted chiefly to a recapitulation of those amenities which I had previously brought under her notice. “ And the cottage, and the—er—garden—and your baby,” I added.

“ S’pose you’d be a kinder religious young fellar ? ” suggested Mrs. Dudman. “ If so, you bin wastin’ your time—same’s I ’ave mine. *Life*, indeed ! What does a rabbit-faced yob like you know about life ? ”

“ For that matter, Mrs. Dudman, what do *you* know about it ? ”

That, Mrs. Dudman explained to me.

“ I know this much,” she said, “ an’ that is if ever I ’ad my choice agen my man ’ud be a bachelor. Good job, too! Give ’im a chance o’ gettin’ married to that yeller-faced cousin of ’is up Bethlehem Hill—’er what’s got ’er back an’ chest changed places. Life, indeed! Fine place to see life in, this is? Sun, indeed! Ow’m I goin’ on for shelter on a washin’ day in summer? *Cottage!* Oo’s got the noosance o’ keepin’ it decent, if ’tain’t me? It’s easier ’ouse-keepin’ in one room, like what you make a fuss about. An’ there’s the garden, too—brings it all in on ’is boots, ’e does, an’ leaves lumps on the floor-boards when I cleaned ’em. As for trees an’ flowers an’ such, I ’ates the sight of ’em.

“ It’s all very well for folks like you, as is down ’ere makin’ ’oliday. I thought different meself at one time, when I come down along o’ the Sunday-school to be boarded out at old Mar Stubbwhite’s, on Bethlehem Hill. I believed in daisies then meself, an’ goin’ walks, an’ watchin’ birds, an’ all the rest damfoolery. An’ so I come back every year till growed-up I was. An’ then I went an’ done it. I married *’im!*

“ Don’t you ever marry outer your class,

young fellar ! Take a woman's word for it, an' don't you do it. That's the mistake what *I* made. I went an' married beneath me.

" The idea of it ! A smart young London gel like me, as could earn 'er two shillin' at the pillar-makin' any day she liked to try—a smart-looking gel like what I was to go an' get 'erself tied up to a country bloke like 'im. Such a cow-sperited man, too. Good job 'e ain't 'ome now. I *do* feel like givin' 'im a slice o' my mind 'sevenin', I do.

" An' there ain't so much as a sink nor a tap in the ole ugly 'ouse !

" An' my mother's got the dropsy. Suppose she was to be took off sudden, with me cooped up like a prisoner down 'ere ! 'Ow'd we be goin' on then, young fellar ?

" If Dudman was to show 'is ugly face in 'ere this minute, I would give 'im such a character as 'e wouldn't never dare come 'ome nearer nor the chicken-coop no more. Cow-sperited fool ! When I was courtin' wiv 'im 'e seemed to 'ave some ginger in 'im. But now I knowed 'im all these years I see my mistake. Whatever I see to like in the fellar *I* do' know. Never knowed about Ole Moore in them days.

" Won't I 'arf tell 'im so, too, when the fool

comes 'ome. I married outer me class, that's what I done. An' it's time 'e knowed about it.

"Two year come Easter it will be since last I wenter London. Seems as long as all the years since I was two. Often go there yeself, I s'pose, young fellar?"

I told her that I was that very morning come from the town.

All she said was "R!" But it sufficed.

"Ever go down Walworth way?" she asked, a little later.

"Quite often," I said.

Again she answered "R!" And then she put some further questions to me.

Did I know a public-house in Walworth Road which was called the Candy Stick? And Bill, the red-haired bar attendant, what lorst his eye through sneering at the Bible? And, if I did rejoice in that acquaintanceship, could I tell her whether this martyr in the cause of Higher Criticism still held office? And did I also know a number of ladies from the pickle factory who used this hostelry? And the Barker's Alley boys who also used it? And did I ever partake of fried fish and potatoes as prepared and vended by Macaroni Joe, of Newington Butts? And, if so, I

could perhaps inform her whether Joe had yet grown tired of that squint-eyed Jew gel what had drove his lawful wife from home? An' what price Gatti's Music Hall in the Westminster Bridge Road? And Fred Tooney, the lion of comedians, who nationalised the words and melody of that surprising anthem "Never Wash the Baby in the Sink"?

"R me! On'y to think of it all!" said Mrs. Dudman. And Mrs. Dudman turned her back upon me in order to view the landscape.

When she turned round, I perceived that the winds which blew from that quarter had evidently affected her voice, for there was a sort of a creak in it.

"Time when I was a nipper," said Mrs. Dudman, "it was a rare game amongst us gels to get makin' plans for the larks we was gointer 'ave when boardin'-out time come round agen an' they sent us to the country. Me an' Rosie Perkis, as was my inspecial pal, we saved up our bits o' ribbons an' 'a'pence an' that for months before'and. And if ever there was meat for dinner, and I got to dreamin', it was always about the fow's an' pigs an' that like. . . . But now it's

all turned round the other way, you see. I married out o' me class, you see. I don't often dream these days, owin' to because o' the strong air on the 'ill-side. But when I *do* get dreamin'—I——

“ I'd give a bit,” pursued the lady, after a somewhat lengthened pause, “ I'd give a bit to go out wi' Rosie an' them pickle gels, an' all the boys down Noo Cut. I'd give a bit to taste a London cabbage, too. R!—an' you don't get none o' them full-flavoured things in these parts like what they sells you at 'ome. An' ever you noticed the way things smell in London of a summer's night? Banana skins an' that, an' the fish shops. An' the blokes wiv strawberry barrers. An' the sights you see! All them 'lectric lights, an' the great spikes o' fire what they 'angs to the barrers, an' men fightin', an' gels bein' chivied, an' the perlice, an' the boys' brigades wiv their whistles, an' the 'buses, an' the barrel-organs, an' orl the fellers in their best scarves, and 'arf o' them wiv marf-orgins. And—and—nobody to talk about Ole Moore?”

I looked at Mrs. Dudman; and that which I saw suggested the prudence of looking elsewhere. So I looked along the road, and observed a joyless fellow with a healthy

face, who came slouching forward. He wore the look as of a puzzled, a somewhat wondering person ; but not of a hopeless or a discontented one. And there was a bunch of emphatic onions in his hand.

“ Don’t—don’t you p-put me down for—for a fool, now,” came in disjected sentences from the woman at my side. “ Because I ain’t ; and—and—that is *’im* along—along the road ; and I must get *’is* tea, an’—an’ I forgot the bread, an’ I ought to be ashamed of meself—grizzlin’ like a silly kid, an’—an’—an’ *’e* can cut *’is* dam onions *’isself*. An’—an’—an’—an’——

“ *’E* don’t mean no *’arm*, really. On’y I merried outer me class.”

XIX

THE GREATEST OF THESE

It is said that Wilfered was found upon the usual doorstep. But his little things were not pinned up with diamond brooches ; nor was there the traditional lock of golden hair within his bosom, nor any bank-notes adhering to his petticoat. The records, in point of fact, do not credit him with having owned a petticoat. " Sex : male," the record says ; " Age (about) : one year ; Name : unknown ; Belongings : flannelette shirt ; Where found : steps of Pinker's Brewery, Salford Lane, Shadwell."

So they took him away and washed him.

And they fed him and named him. And the name which they gave to him was Wilfered. This was subsequently expanded ; for the infant Wilfered got transported in the usual manner to a country home. They sent him into Buckinghamshire (" boarding out " is the technical expression), and he became the foster-son of Frederick Wye, wheelwright, and Grace Constantia Wye, the latter's wife.

The transaction which provided Wilfered with these excellent guardians was, nominally, a matter of business. Wilfered was conveyed into the country of the Wyes under the guardianship of a thin young lady with a charitable expression and accompanied by a canvas parcel containing three of everything. Frederick Wye, wheelwright, walked five miles over the hills to meet their train, attired in his velvet waistcoat and the amazing brown hat which he wore to chapel on Sundays. And having arrived at the railway station, Wilfered and Wilfered's trousseau was given into his keeping, as also the sum of one pound and two shillings in coin, representing Wilfered's board and lodging for one month. Having disposed this wealth about his person and having signed a number of documents, the technical phraseology of which represented about as much to his mind as if they had been written in Welsh, Mr. Wye shook hands with the thin young lady and filled his hat—the hat—with literature issued by the society which she represented. And then, with a hat full of piety and his arms full of Wilfered and Wilfered's belongings, he walked the five miles home again.

When he arrived at Cherry Row, which was

his native village, Mrs. Wye came out to meet him. "You *got* the le'l mossel, thin?" said Mrs. Wye. You will observe that her first inquiry did not concern the one-pound-two—a fact which I deem to be significant.

"I got him, Mar," responded Mr. Wye. He had called her "Mar" for fourteen years, quite without justification; for, to use Mr. Wye's own simile, "she be barren as a spinster."

"Pray, now," declared Mar, when Wilfered had been subjected to analysis. "Pray, now. 'Aht be ever sich a mossel, now! Did ever there be sich a mossel?"

"He do 'pear pimmicky, so to speak," assented Mr. Wye. "And yet the le'l beggar don't 'pear so light to carry, then. He lays heavy on the arm, somehow."

"Goo lung wi' yew!" protested Grace Constantia, as she took the infant from him. "'Aht don't weigh no consequence whatever. 'Aht be loight's a chicken. 'Eavy on the arm, indeed! You be took pimmicky yeself, I do declare."

"Very loikely," assented the dutiful Wye. "'Aht be warmish 'sarternnoon, what we Sunday weskits an' all. . . . Here be the money what the lady give me, an' here be his le'l what-nots an' here be a parcel o' Sunday

readin' an' sich. An' there'll be ladies come round to see as we do fair boi 'im, an' a genelman will bring 'is boardin'-money on the first of every month. He be for pap an' porridge, the lady tell me. An' he be for new-boiled eggs and le'l sups o' milk. And he be for constant washin' and a separate bed and the top of the window always open and—and—I misrem'ber any more."

"The idea of the man!" commented Mrs. Wye. "To set out an' teach a woman 'ow to moind her babby, then."

And having thus rebuked the man's presumption, Mrs. Wye kicked open the little criss-cross gate of their cottage and walked in, pressing Wilfered close to her flat bosom. Frederick followed her, bearing the what-nots and the money and the literature.

They closed the door behind them, which was unusual; and when some minutes later a red-faced gentleman came round with his pipe to talk about Frederick's sunflowers, he viewed the fastened port with evident astonishment. A lusty challenge brought forth Frederick—brought him out, that is to say, so far as the second sunflower on the right-hand side looking from his doorstep. Frederick was stripped to his shirt and wore a

business-like expression. His unconventional appearance, together with his attachment to the doorstep, made it obvious that the Wyes were not receiving. And if the red-faced visitor had any doubts about the matter, they were speedily dispelled. For Frederick incontinently dismissed him, with superabundant gesture. "Come round o' Saturday," cried Frederick. "Busy now. We be for tittumvating our le'l buy."

So Wilfered was coaxed and titumvated into a very excellent representation of healthy boyhood. The what-nots had ceased to be an important part of his wardrobe ere Cherry Row had known him for a twelvemonth. But they served him in a subsidiary capacity for years; and he had celebrated his fifth birthday before the last surviving member of his original outfit was discarded. It was an interesting garment, which originally had been three, and Grace Constantia, recognising the impossibility of further reinforcement, abandoned it with sighs.

For the remainder of this story you must imagine Wilfered as arrayed in a constant succession of abbreviated Fredericks.

As Wilfered grew taller, his breeches became correspondingly shorter, and it was

necessary to repair this discrepancy, a feat which Grace Constantia performed by means of strips collected from the wardrobe of Frederick. Grace Constantia termed these objects "cuffs," and the process of expansion she called "cuffing." Every imaginable kind of fabric was laid under contribution to supply the pressing needs of Wilfered; and as cuff after cuff was added to his trousers, those habiliments assumed presently an aspect of striped splendour most dazzling to the eye.

And Wilfered grew and grew. It was as though he ran a race with the cuffs. And he learned to play cricket. And he learned to read and to do sums and to take his cap off to the gentry. He learned also to use a spoke-shave and bend a tyre. For Frederick Wye, wheelwright, was not the man to let youth starve for want of any knowledge which that accomplished person could supply.

Wilfered, supposing he had ever troubled to consider of such matters, must have owned himself to be a very happy boy. There was no boy of his own age in the village, nor had ever been, whom he could not, when occasion demanded such action, knock down and roll on. There was no other boy in the village

who possessed a flower-garden of his own ; a flower-garden, moreover, having a clump of pinks and several radishes at bloom therein. There was likewise no other boy in the vicinity whose father had been wounded in the Zulu War and who could exhibit the marks every Saturday night to an admiring family. And what other boy owned a tortoise ? And what other boy's grandfather had a cherry orchard and a tricycle ? And what other boy could rival Wilfered's cuffings ? Finally—and this was undoubtedly the crowning feature of Wilfered's superiority—what other boy owned a gentleman ?

Wilfered's gentleman was an object of wonder and reverence in the village. He came to Wilfered's cottage on the first day of every month and presented Wilfered's mother with large sums of money and Wilfered with a smile and a pat on the head and a penny. He was the kindest and most punctual old gentleman. He jingled with gold and crackled with papers, to some of which Wilfered's mother would attach her signature. Wilfered would look forward to his coming for days in advance, and his best and most favourite dream was the one in which this old gentleman came down from heaven hanging to an um-

brella (like the lady on Wilfered's "Margate" mug), and showered pennies on everybody and smiled his smile and crackled his papers and crew like a cock and vanished. Whenever Wilfered was instructed in the mysteries of creation (which was frequently) and visualised, as children do, the many surprising facts related to him, he would always imagine Jehovah as wearing the same hat and the same smile and the same whiskers as his "gentleman."

Wilfered owned some ladies, too ; but it cannot truthfully be said that he ranked them also among the amenities of his existence. They did not visit him so often as the gentleman did ; but Wilfered thought, nevertheless, that they visited him quite often enough. The uncomfortable fact about these ladies was their curiosity. It was of the most consuming kind, and manifested itself strangely, even to the unbuttoning of Wilfered's collar and an elaborate scrutiny of the ear which he forgot to wash that morning. The sense of delicacy did not even restrain them from examining the secrets of his wardrobe.

But as time went on the visits of these inquisitive dames became less frequent and more formal—so formal, indeed, that Wilfered

was able to contemplate them in comparative calm. And one of the ladies—the grey one who squinted rather—rendered herself almost popular towards the end of the story by presenting Wilfered with a cricket bat—a second-hand and rather damaged one, but yet the real thing, with a real splice.

So Wilfered, being then in his fourteenth year, smote away at the communal string-ball with zest and emphasis, and at last, one evening, he was able to come panting home with news of the utmost urgency.

“Mo’er! Mo’er! Oi be to play for the vellage, Mo’er,” cried Wilfered, dancing upon the greensward and upon a new-washed tablecloth which his “mother” had spread there.

“*What* be that Oi yare?” Mr. Wye himself came out of his workshed to swell the audience.

“Oi be to play for the vellage,” repeated Wilfered. “Oold Gomm, the blacksmeth, ’e be took bad of ’is muscles an’ he be to goo to Petterling, ’lung of the ’firmary. And young Bobby Dell, he be for his soldiering with the Milishey. So they be a man or two short, so Oi be to play, and the next match, that be Saturday week, and moind you git moi shirt washed, Mo’er!”

“ That be washed this mennit, y’ onkid le’l daval, yew, Gard bless yew ! ” responded Mo’er. . . . “ But—ee ! Pray, now ! ’Aht’ll be rare noos for yewr genelman, ’aht will, when he come here in the marnin’. Oh, pray, then, to-morrer be his marnin’, sure ’nuff. Confound moi garters, then, but thaht’ll startle him.”

But the gentleman wasn’t startled after all. The boot was on the other leg.

When Wilfered, wet with cricket practice, presented himself before his gentleman to receive the customary benediction and reward, it was to find that worthy person smiling away more than ever. But the countenance of Frederick wore an expression the reverse of smiling ; and it was a passion of pure hysteria with which Mo’er embraced the boy as he entered. “ Moi le’l lahd ; moi le’l lahd ! ” cried Mo’er. “ You be for Canada.”

And Wilfered, who was of an age when the understanding is not rapid, answered simply : “ Yes, Mo’er.”

“ You be for Canada ! yew poor mossel,” repeated the woman.

“ Wait for a answer, Mo’er ? ” demanded Wilfered.

At this the woman cried. But the sim-

plicity of Wilfered's question found an appreciative auditor in the gentleman.

"There! there! my lad," he exclaimed, with a chuckle. "You'll do. *Undoubtedly* you'll do. Wait for an answer. Ha! Ha!"

And Frederick—the chapel-going Frederick—came out from his place within the shadow of the wall and stood where the sunlight fell upon his sombre face. "The davil take yew and yewr cursed giggles," he remarked to the gentleman. . . . "Look a-here, now: Oi tell yew wanst for all as thes le'l lahd, yere, he don't be for no Canada. He be to bide at 'oom, now, 'lung o' me and 'is mother what as sewed the very knickers what he stands in. And if 'tis the money what your precious s'ciety be lookin' to—whoi, I got moi bank-book ready to be looked at, an' they shall 'ave back every damned penny ever——"

"My good man," interpolated Wilfered's gentleman, smiling more blandly than ever, "this is not at all a question of money. This is a question of principle. My society is the legal guardian of this boy, and we have arranged for his departure to Canada on this day week. He will go out with a party of other lads, numbering fourteen in all, and

after spending six months upon our training-farm in the State of Ontario we shall——”

“Trainin’ - fairrm !” echoed Frederick. “What be he wantin’ wi’ trainin’ fairrms ? He be a wheelwright, same’s ’is father. Oi taught the lad meself, an’ Oi taught ’im proper. A wheelwright’s trade that be as good as yare and theer one.”

“Quite so, my friend ; quite so,” assented the gentleman, with his cordial smile. “I don’t dispute it for a moment. But this, you see, as I said before, is a question of *principle*. Our society is most strongly opposed to any departure from principle. We *never* relinquish our guardianship. Hundreds of proposals exactly similar to yours reach us every year ; but we always refuse to entertain them. The rules bear hardly in individual cases, I will admit ; but, ah, the principle, my friend, the *principle*, that remains. You have my sympathy in this case—you and your good wife ; but that is all the comfort I can offer you. And, really, when one comes to think about it, have you *really* so much to complain of ? The lad is a smart lad ; he is certain to do well in Canada ; he will doubtless correspond with you frequently, and when—ah !—after some years of industry,

he is able—ah!—to indulge in the luxury of a little holiday, you will be able to welcome home the bronzed and altered traveller. The bronzed and altered traveller. Ha! Ha!”

“We don’t want no damnation travellers,” explained the courteous Frederick. “We want our le’l lahd. We want him yare, abiding ’oom wi’ us. The wheelwrought’s trade, thaht be so good as yare an’ theer one. A lahd don’t starve at thaht. An’ from arl Oi ever read an’ see about they Colonies, there’s more’n some goes ’ungry theer. Goo long wi’ yew, mester. Our le’l buy theer, he don’t be for no Canadas.”

“But I’m afraid he does be for Canada,” rejoined the gentleman, smiling more pleasantly than ever. “You have no legal right whatever in the boy—none *whatever*; he has received his marching orders, and we shall see that he obeys them. Kindly see that he reports himself at Walworth Road Headquarters by Wednesday morning next. Good-day to you.”

The mask of truculence fell suddenly away from Frederick. “One minute, mester; oonly one minute,” he cried. “Won’t you give the lahd another month? He doon’t understand the meanin’ of ‘Canada,’ let

alone the big world what's afore 'im. Won't you give the lahd another month at 'oom, 'lung of us, so's we can—so we can—we can show 'im the pictures an' thaht ? ”

The genial gentleman shook his head. “ A question of principle,” he said.

Then Frederick, walking queerly, like a man who had been drinking, crossed over to the place where Wilfered stood in silence and wondered at it all—this heated argument ; his father's anger ; the gentleman's amusement ; his mother's tears. “ Wilfered,” said Frederick, “ you be to live in Canada. Gard halp yew. In Canada, where 'tis allus snowing.”

“ But—but,” expostulated Wilfered, “ Oi don't want to. Oi—Oi be to play for the vellage on thes day week. Yes, Oi do ; Oi be to play for the vellage.”

“ You be to live in Canada,” repeated Frederick. “ Gard halp yew.”

It may not exactly have been good cricket form ; but Wilfered sought the arms of Grace Constantia.

“ You poor le'l mossel, then ; yew poor, poor mossel,” cried his mother.

And the smiling gentleman said : “ Dear me ! ” He owned, as he departed, that the

situation was distressing. "But," he added, "we *must* support the principle!"

As he closed the little criss-cross gate and turned his back upon the sunflowers, he heard the voice of Wilfered lifted up in protest.

"Oi won't. Oi won't. . . . Don't ever yew lat them, Mo'er," cried the voice of Wilfered. . . . "Oi be to play for the vellage, Mo'er!"

XX

THE LADY WITH THE FRINGE

I MET her upon the high road, near by Blowfield, which is in Sussex.

She was forty years old, at a venture. She had lots of mouth and a salmon-coloured face and a pretence of a nose and small, watery eyes. All these amenities were built up upon a triple foundation of chin, which was well matched by an exceeding amplitude of bosom and waist.

She sat, in the company of a tin can and a bundle, on a bank by the roadside, and she had taken off her boots, and was nursing them. By way of head-gear, she wore a man's "bowler" hat, with its brim flattened out. Beneath this hat was a straight, damp fringe ; and from behind the fringe her two little eyes looked vaguely forth, and seemed to splutter and flicker like bad night-lights.

As I drew near to her she waved a boot at me, and when I came nearer still she spoke to me, saying, quite unaffectedly :

"Cheero, ole lovely ! Got a fag ? "

Such expressions of pure, womanly affection, meeting one suddenly on a rather narrow road, naturally confuse one ; and scarcely realising the gravity of the act, I gave this lady one of my last two cigarettes.

"Tar!" said she. "Got a match, ole dear?"

Matches also I gave to her ; and she said : "I will keep the box, ole sweet'eart. Got anuver fag fur the road?"

The other "fag" was my last "fag," and unless you are a Bible character, you don't. I didn't.

"No more cigarettes left!" echoed the lady with the fringe. "Well, well, ole Beauty, I'll take tuppence."

"And I, if you please, ma'am," quoth your servant, "will take a seat."

She very courteously removed the bundle, and I sat down beside her.

"And now, my love," said the lady with the fringe, addressing me by means of a rather heavy elbow, "you'll be givin' me that tuppence—heh?"

"What do you want the money for?" I bluntly asked her.

"Beer," she bluntly answered.

"And are you really very poor and needy?" I asked, eying the bundle.

"That bundil there need never worry you, my angel," declared the lady. "To tell you candid, dearie, all what that ole bundil there 'as got inside of it is one red petticoat, one pair stays, one 'arf cabbidge, an' me merried lines."

"Must be a big half-cabbage," I ventured to suggest, again examining the bundle.

The lady blinked at me sweetly. "Pore lad: ye're teasin', ain't you, my precious?" she observed. "Think I'm lyin' to you, don't you, darling? Then I'll tell you a little secret, pretty. That lumpy part of the bundil, the part what looks a lot, like, the part what is all knob—that part of the bundil is merried lines, ole sweet.

"Of course," she added, rather hotly, having closely examined my countenance, "you can please yeself about believin' me. On'y I ain't the sort of lady to sit down and be called a liar be *anybody*: in specially not be strangers, no matter 'ow funny they are to look at. I ain't annoyed with you, Archibald; but I might be."

"That movement of my mouth," I assured her, "was purely muscular."

"Try me in 'Ebrew: I dunno no Dutch," responded the lady.

"At the same time," I continued, "one can't help thinking that it would take an awful lot of marriage lines to fill so big a knob as that."

"Well—an' what of it?" demanded the lady with the fringe.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Sit still!" said the lady. . . . "Anybody 'd think, to 'ear you prattle, as a person *could* only be merried once in this world. 'Ow many lots o' merried lines do you suppose I got, now?"

I shook my head.

"Don't wiggle and don't waggle," said the lady; "but 'ave another good look at that knob."

I did as I was ordered to do, but the process helped me little. "Might be any number!" was all that I felt in honour able to say.

"Well, Bert," said the lady with the fringe, "I can't truthfully say as ever I bin to the troubil o' countin' 'em; but this I *can* tell you—there's a coal-box full!"

Having exclaimed at this surprising statement, I made bold to inquire (hoping she would pardon my curiosity) whatever had become of all her husbands!

The lady guffawed in a hearty and unaffected manner. "You'll be the deaf of me, ole Treasure," she declared; "you will, reely. Whatever 'as become of all my 'usbands? Did ever anybody 'ear! You couldn't beat that, not on a Good Friday! Go' bless my soul, Ronald; what *do* you take me for? I couldn't answer that question no more than the Queen o' Spain. I couldn't tell you what's become of the ole dears.

"I couldn't make a guess at it even! There's some of 'em 'ere, I make no doubt, and some of 'em there. They come an' go, old love; they come an' go.

"Some was nice an' some was nasty, some was good an' some was lively. An' one on 'em was a powit. There was all sorts.

"But when you arst me what's become of 'em, when you arst me where they are or *how* they are or *what* they are—well, then, you arst a riddel. Lor' love you, Reginald, ye're aunt don't know, nor ye're aunt don't care. What I says is this: There's as good men on the road as ever went orf of it."

I acquiesced in this generalisation, and the lady with the fringe sat silent, chewing at her cigarette. Presently, after bestowing upon me a shy smile, she leaned forward and

thumped me violently between the shoulder-blades.

"Tell you what, ole Treasure," she exclaimed. "I've 'arf a mind or more to merry you! Seems to me I bin a widder long enough. You are gettin' good money, I daresay?"

Wealth is, of course, a purely comparative expression. Perhaps I get good money enough from the standpoint of frugal bachelorhood, but from no possible monetary standpoint am I fit to be regarded as an eligible suitor for the hand of a widowed lady. I said so.

"Well, well, Oswald," replied the lady with the fringe, "money ain't everythink. There's many a lovin' 'eart 'as warmed itself on purridge. I got enough cold toke of one sort and another left in that bundil fur the two on us. An' we can save money over the merried lines; one o' the old ones can easy be altered to fit. An' we will go 'oppin' together, an' we will get converted an' be lent a cottage be the vicar. I'm on me way to the 'oppin' now. There's rare fun at the 'oppin'.

"So now then, my angel," pursued the lady, "what do you say?" She carefully divided her fringe in its thickest part and

beamed upon me blindingly from both little eyes.

"My dear madam," I began, hoping to construct a courtly speech, "your kindness and—ah—amiability and—ah—your kindness and amiability—are—are——"

"Don't make a song about it, cocky," interpolated the fair suitor. "Cut the fancy work and talk English. Don't mind *me*. Neether you nor your big brother could put *me* off me vittles. So don't 'um and don't 'ar. If you ain't agreeable, leave off fidgetin' and say so, plain."

I said it, plainly.

"Well, well," murmured the lady with the fringe. "There's as good men on the road as ever went orf of it. That's my motter. So you ain't a-gointer merry me?"

"I ain't."

"But you *are* gointa gimme that tuppence, ain't you, Percy?" said the lady.

The situation had become delicate. It seemed to me that, in the circumstances, a chivalrous gentleman could do no less than hand over any loose pence which his pocket might happen to contain. With that aloofness from futile sentiment which formed so striking a feature of her character, the lady

with the fringe placed my offering upon her open palm, and inspected it critically.

"One—two—three—an'—a—'arf—four—fi'pence 'apenny!" she proclaimed. "Couldn't you spring anuver 'apenny, Mr. Gluckstein, and bring it up to the even tanner?"

"You'll be blowed if you will? All right, young feller, I'll be blowed if I care."

The lady with the fringe gathered the coins together, and placed them in an old red handkerchief which appeared to be performing the duties of a garter.

Then she stood up and plucked a harebell, and chewed thoughtfully at its stalk. "'Ot, ain't it?" she puffed, straightening the fringe as she squinted up an appalling vista of sun-baked road. "'Ow many miles to the Beer, Sir Garnet?"

About two, I thought.

"That's done easy enough when you've fi'pence 'apenny in ye're stocking," said the lady. "Glad as I met you, ole dove. I bin stone-broke since yesterday. All I got tucked away when I met you was a pawnticket and some 'air-curlers."

"Some *what*?" I asked.

"'Air-curlers, dearie—fur me fringe."

I regarded the straight, damp thing which

obscured her eyelets—and wondered. I looked at the battered man's hat, the fragmentary old sack of a garment, the hopeless bundle, the tin can—and I wondered. I looked at her ridiculous face and the bootless feet, and still I wondered. It struck me then how queer a thing it is to be a woman. The sensation must be complicated past expression.

“What is it, Willie?” cried the lady suddenly, as she pounced down upon something white which lay on the grass by my side.

“That is my pocket-handkerchief,” I said.

“I'll keep 'im, ole dear,” said the lady with the fringe. “It'll do fur a keepsake. . . . It'll fetch a copper, too. You ain't agoin', ole sweet?” she continued, as I rose up, gripping my handbag very tightly; for it occurred to me that I might as well keep that.

“Yes,” said I. “I'm going now. I've got a train to catch.”

“Then,” announced the lady with the fringe, “I'm comin' with you, to kerry the bag.”

This was just what I had feared. I retreated a pace or two; but the lady with the fringe pursued me. There was distinct purpose in her two little eyes, and the suggestion of a flush seemed to glimmer through the dust

upon her cheek. "I'm 'avin' that bag, young man," she said. And she had it.

She collected the bundle and the tin can, and put on her boots. I awaited developments with anxiety. My expectation was that she would bid me an affectionate farewell and depart her ways, leaving me to take what steps I chose for the recovery of the bag.

But I maligned the lady. She was not a luggage thief. "Push on, my precious," she said. "I'm carryin' ye're bag for you."

"Nonsense!" I protested. "You have enough to carry of your own. And you are yearning to drink up that fivence ha'penny. The hour for parting has arrived."

"I'm kerryin' the bag for you, Algernon," said the lady with the fringe. "And if you argue, I shall set about you. Push on, sonny."

So I pushed on; and the lady with the fringe, perspiring heavily and grunting, but full of conversation, laboured along by my side. She told me all about the hopfields and her husbands, and discussed, with many apt descriptive touches, the comparative discomforts of all the gaols in England.

And in reply to all my protests, she answered thus: "*Hi* am kerryin' the bag,

young feller. Don't argue. Used to kerryin' things, I am."

When we got to a point within hail of my destination, she stopped and sat down by the roadside, laid by the bundle and can, and once more took off her boots. Then she gave me back my bag.

"I'll rest me yere," she said. "You can do what's over on ye're lonesome. 'Tain't fur. When I'm rested a bit, I'll git back to where we started from. What about that 'apenny, dear boy?"

I found a little more money for her, and thanked her, and turned to depart. But——

"You ain't agoin' off like that!" she cried. "Without so much as a kiss for auntie?"

In stepping hastily backwards, I very nearly put my foot in a wasps' nest.

The lady with the fringe strode up to me. "Proud, are you?" she cried. "Then take that, you monkey-faced baboon."

I took it, and can feel the tingle yet.

XXI

THE CANNIBALS

I

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly—the Eyetalian lady she is called, in all good faith by her Sussex neighbours—arose one morning in complete forgetfulness of the season.

She rang her spiteful little hand-bell seven times before the clock struck eight. She rang for her letters ; she rang for tea ; she rang for water. She rang indignantly to send the tea away because it was not hot enough, and again to complain of the water, which was too hot, and again to complain of noises from the kitchen—noises incidental to the preparation of her breakfast—and yet again she rang in order to remark how badly that repast had been prepared. Her final and most insistent summons was the prelude to certain cogent and comprehensive utterances on the subject of menial incompetence, capitalist martyrdom, the smell from the scullery, more noises from the kitchen, cats on the roof, doors being left open, stair-rods unpolished—everything !

Ellen Mary Pearce listened to it all with downcast eyes and an expression of wrapt indifference. You would have supposed that my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly bored her dreadfully.

But Ellen Mary's manner of jabbing at the stair-rods when she subsequently faced those dumb tyrants was not exactly the manner of boredom. The hot, unwilling tears which splashed into her box of brass-rags were not exactly tears of boredom. "Think I care? Not me?" muttered Ellen Mary, jabbing at the stair-rods till her nails bled.

If Ellen Mary conducted herself like a very angry little girl, you are not to wonder at it. For really it is an angering thing to be young and juicy for other people's benefit.

The other people were: (1) My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly; (2) 'Er.

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly one could put up with, Ellen thought. She had her bad mornings, like this morning, when her black eyes burnt holes in you, and her lean frame and yellow skin and dusty hair were unpleasant objects to be permanently established behind a bell which never left off ringing. But then, on the other hand, my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly did not always do

thus. She was often, Ellen would tell you, "very ladylike"; nay, more—she was often very gay—in that queer Eyetalian manner of hers. Of course, it was true that she spoke very fast and always looked through you, and that she was always saying strange and unexpected things which were hard upon the understanding of a coppersmith's youngest daughter; but in spite of these vices, one might endure my Aunt Elizabeth. *She* seemed to have a kind heart—of its queer Eyetalian sort. But '*Er*!

Oh my goodness—'*ER*!

No girl could stand '*Er*. If you was to cut yourself into a hundred million pieces you couldn't satisfy '*Er*. If you was to do a thousand things at once and die at '*Er* feet in doing them, she would still find work for your immortal soul to do; she would not even turn from her stockpot, but stoop and sniff and grumble as always, and threaten your stiffening corpse with the old, old threat of "telling the missus," and wonder where you were dragged up, and what the girls of to-day were good for. And when they buried you she would stand over the grave and recite her endless monologue, beginning with the words "When *I* first went to service."

Whenever Ellen Mary thought about 'Er, she had to get up and shake herself. She did so now, leaning out of the landing window.

She looked out into the little garden which fronted her mistress's cottage. She watched the ill-bred blackbirds as with shrill cries they darted in and out of the under-part of the hedges, pursuing each other with rough caresses like badly-brought-up boys and girls. She watched old Mr. Rummery, the jobbing gardener, as he slowly untied a shoot which he had tied up to the rose-arch last week, and then, with infinite pains, retied it. She perceived, with the understanding which is natural to a country girl, that he was preserving the bloom of his vigour for the lawn-mowing season. In the meantime, he was making a careful and conscientious job of the rose-arch.

Suddenly Ellen's attention was directed to the garden gate by a low whistle. She looked and beheld, a little beyond the gate, a dirty, happy little girl—a rebel, a mutineer, like the buds and song-birds which were breaking out all round her.

“Who, 'tis Gert Miller!” cried Ellen Mary. “Where *you* bin?”

“I bin among the daffodils,” replied the

girl behind the gate. "Down in the Tenter Mead. Look!" She held up a great armful of sunshine.

"Oh dear, but you beant 'arf muddied!" commented Ellen Mary.

The little girl behind the sunshine laughed defiantly. "*Oi* doon't care," she said. "*Oi* run away. *Moi* oold aunt she woon't 'arf carry on whin *Oi* git back."

"Hoo! Hoo!" cried Ellen Mary.

"Hee! Hee!" cheeped the connoisseur in sunshine.

It was doubtless an excellent joke. But while the young ladies were enjoying it, my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly had rung her spiteful little bell. She had rung her bell three times. She had rung it for her garden boots and her big oak stick, having suddenly remembered that this was Mr. Rummery's morning. My Aunt Elizabeth was desirous of conveying to Mr. Rummery her assurance that what he had done to the pea-bed last week had in nowise inconvenienced it, and her hope that the feat in question had occasioned him no fatigue.

Having received no answer to her summons and having been curious to know the reason why—besides being eager for the battle with

Mr. Rummery—my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly burst out of her bedroom on to the landing. There she beheld Miss Ellen Mary Pearce.

Ellen drew in her breath and ducked her eyes and waited.

But that for which she waited did not come.

Through the open window my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly had seen a piece of dappled sky, and the blackbirds, and Mr. Rummery, and the buds around him, amongst which there was a mutiny, a breaking out.

She also saw the dirty face of Miss Miller and the bundle of sunshine in her arms.

And like the queer Eyetalian woman which she is, my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly began to smile.

II

To the surprise of Ellen Mary, my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly returned to her bedroom without offering any comment upon the unfinished appearance of the stair-rods. Nor did she raise this dreaded subject when Ellen Mary brought her the garden boots and stick. But when Ellen Mary had returned to the stair-rods, my Aunt Elizabeth called her back and uttered a strange speech. She said ;

“ I don't think the stair-rods really matter. You had better go out and get some daffodils.”

Then, while Ellen Mary gasped and wondered, my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly put on her queer, big garden boots, clapped an old felt hat upon her head, grasped the oak stick, and stumped downstairs into the garden.

Out in the garden, Mr. Rummery was still temporising with the rose shoots. The noisy blackbirds still played “ I spy ” in and out of the hedges ; rebellion among the buds was still proceeding vigorously ; the birds still shouted their tremendous songs of liberty ; and three Persian kittens (whose mother didn't know) were pursuing the high Adventure among green shoots of Pampas grass, yards and yards away from the family sugar-box. !

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly gazed at these multivious phenomena with a thoughtful eye, and, quite unmindful of her purpose in visiting the garden, passed by Mr. Rummery with a mere nod, and walked out of her little green gate on to the high road.

A little distance up the road there is another small green gate (belonging to somebody else's lonely aunt), and at this gate stood young Miss Miller with her sunshine. She had found

another Ellen Mary with whom to hold discourse.

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly quickened her pace. But before she could catch up to the daffodils they had run away. At another gate—a shabby, ramshackle affair—still farther up the road, my Aunt Pengelly found them again. She found also Miss Anne Miller, Gertie's aunt.

Miss Anne Miller was addressing some home-truths to her niece. “ You be a worthless gad-about ; that's what you be,” said Miss Anne Miller. “ There's no trustin' you at all. What be yere poor ole grannie to do, then, when you go racin' orf into the medders along after nonsense, and me got to do your jobs and nobody to give the pore ole lady 'er breakfas' ? Leave they mucky blooms where they lie and git along insoide and look to your pore ole grannie ; I are seen to *your* work.”

“ What beautiful daffodils ; are they really wild ones ? ” said the voice of my Aunt Elizabeth, as the form of Gertrude withdrew into the privacy of a wash-house.

“ She *say* they be,” responded Miss Miller, curtseying briefly. “ The pudden-faced wilful le'l thing—she run away at eight o'clock this marnin' and beant come back till now.

And 'er pore ole gran'ma waitin' to be washed: for *I* couldn't leave the 'ouse-work."

"At any rate," suggested my Aunt Elizabeth, "your bad little niece has played truant to some purpose. Aren't they *splendid* daffodils?"

Miss Miller expressed by a gurgle that which could not otherwise be expressed without profanity.

"I beant one to take much notice of they sort o' tackle," she said. "When I be 'er age, maids was kept too busy to spend their marnin's daffydilling. When I be Gert's age there weren't no aunt atome to share the work. I 'ad to mind 'ouse and mind father, and mind everything, as well as mind 'er."

'Er in this case was Miss Miller's mother. My Aunt Elizabeth reflected, with a little shudder, that Anne had indeed been minding her mother for many years. It was absurd to suppose that Anne had ever been so young as Gertie; but my aunt reflected that she herself had lived next door but one to Anne for nearly twenty years, and that at the commencement of that period Anne had looked less old. But even when my aunt first knew her, Anne had been "minding" her mother for an incalculable period.

"These young girls of to-day," said Miss Miller, "they be——"

"And how *is* your poor mother," interrupted my Aunt Elizabeth. She saw no reason for listening to Anne's conversation.

"About the same as usual," answered Anne. "You kin see 'er if you want to."

With these graceful words Miss Miller conducted my Aunt Elizabeth to the wash-house door, which she pushed open with her knee. The wash-house was filled with steam, arising from some cabbages and some blankets which were being boiled therein.

When the air which came in through the open doorway had scattered some of the mists, my Aunt Elizabeth perceived Anne's mother, who was being rapidly and violently towelled by Gertie, her granddaughter.

Anne's mother was a perfectly imbecile old lady, of extreme age. She sat in a high-backed chair, to which Anne's brother, now a police-sergeant, retired, had in the year 1880 affixed some rough wooden wheels. These wheels still held, though they had of late shown signs of weakness. But Anne was loath to incur the expense of new ones, for as she would explain to visitors, gently patting her mother's head as she spoke—"there beant no knowing when

she'll choke out. . . . Poor soul, she be that eager for 'er vittles."

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly, suppressing another little shudder, stood in the doorway and looked at Anne's mother. Anne's mother stared straight before her into the steam.

On being beckoned to by Annie, my Aunt Elizabeth walked forward. Miss Miller, seizing one of the lifeless arms which hung by her mother's side, jerked it forward. "You can shake 'ands with her if you want to, miss," said Anne.

My Aunt Elizabeth performed this act of courtesy and—went away. Her last look was at little Gertie, towelling Anne's mother with both hands. Her last thought was of Anne.

"That thing has been eating Anne for twenty years to *my* knowledge," said Miss Pengelly to herself.

She paused at the gate to steal a few of Gertie's daffodils. She thought of Gertie's busy, tireless little arms, and she thought what a queer sort of sunshine they were gathering now.

Then she looked up and beheld—another invalid.

III

This was her important neighbour, Lady Knagg—Lady Knagg of “The Hall”—with whom was her silent, dull-eyed daughter, the Honourable Eileen Knagg. Lady Knagg reposed in her Bath chair, to which was harnessed a small black Shetland pony, of great girth and respectful manners. The Honourable Eileen Knagg stood at the pony’s head and clasped its bridle. In her other hand she held her ladyship’s purse, her ladyship’s novel, and her ladyship’s handkerchief, while her arm supported a cushion and a selection of her ladyship’s rugs.

“My dear Lady Knagg,” cried Miss Pengelly, “how wonderfully well you are looking! Aren’t these daffodils perfectly splendid!”

“My dear Miss Pengelly,” said Lady Knagg, “I have been terribly unwell. The flowers are nice.”

“I suppose,” said my Aunt Elizabeth, addressing the honourable Eileen Knagg, “that the top end of the Park is ablaze with them now?”

“I don’t know,” said the Honourable Eileen.

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly raised her left eyebrow one-sixteenth of an inch.

"Eileen," explained her ladyship, "has had no time to look for buttercups. I have been so dreadfully ill. She is such a devoted daughter."

"But now that your ladyship is better," suggested my Aunt Elizabeth, "Eileen ought really to go and peep at them. Perhaps," continued my Aunt Elizabeth, turning to the daughter, "you will take me with you and I will show you some splendid clumps close to those old beeches. I haven't practised trespassing all these years for nothing. Can you take me?"

"I don't know," said the Honourable Eileen, looking hopefully at her mother.

"We shall be so glad if you will trespass in the Park as often as you please, dear Miss Pengelly," said her ladyship. "And we shall be so glad if you will pick as many buttercups as you can find, and do please come to tea and show them to us. But don't, *please* don't tempt poor Eileen to go with you. She is such a devoted daughter, and I am often so dreadfully ill."

It seemed to my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly that the dull eyes of the devoted daughter grew one shade duller when her mother had delivered this speech.

IV

My Aunt Elizabeth, tapping the ground a little viciously with her big oak stick, walked back to the little green gate, thinking hard of Lady Knagg and of Lady Knagg's fat hand and full red cheek, and of Eileen's tired back and stupid eyes.

When she arrived at the little green gate, who should be standing there but—'Er.

"If you please, miss," was her greeting, "that Ellen 'as run away."

My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly walked through the gate and carefully closed it behind her. Then she vouchsafed an answer unto 'Er. "Nonsense!" she said.

"But indeed, miss, she 'ave," persisted the cook. "'I'm goin' out to fetch some daffodil,' says she, and away she ran. I bin waitin' ever since to tell you, miss. I don't know when I kin remember bein' so upset in me life—and this the day for havin' up the drorin'-room carpet, too. As I say to Rummery, miss, it ain't as if some of us was gettin' any younger."

"I told her to go out and play," said my Aunt Elizabeth quietly.

For a long time no sound came out of 'Er.

Then, in a queer, unnatural voice (the result of shock), she said :

" But if you please, miss, this is the day for havin' up the drorin'-room carpet."

" I know," said my Aunt Elizabeth.

Cook grew very red.

" I know also," said my Aunt Elizabeth, " that you will give me notice ; but then again, I know that you won't mean it."

" You see, miss"—the words proceeded falteringly from 'Er—" it ain't as if some of us was gettin' any younger."

" That," replied my Aunt Elizabeth, " is no reason why we should eat up those who *are* young."

" Certainly not, miss ; certainly *not*," assented Cook. She paused, and for some moments wrestled visibly with an apparent *non sequitor*. It is possible, however, that, in her own mind, Cook applied some less scientific term to my Aunt Elizabeth's extraordinary utterances. She then said, simply :

" But what about fetchin' up the drorin'-room carpet, miss ? "

" You and I can do that," replied my Aunt Elizabeth.

A prolonged and audible gasp escaped from 'Er. Then :

"If Ellen Mary is to remain in this 'ouse, miss, I must leave. I don't 'old with favouritism, nor never did. It ain't as if——"

"We were young for always," interpolated my Aunt Elizabeth. "I don't hold with cannibalism, Cook. There isn't so much Youth in the world that we old women can afford to devour it up like cabbage. When people are so nearly dead that they can only be kept alive by the bodies of their little brothers and their little sisters, I think that somebody ought to come round with a poleaxe and make them quite dead. You can go, now, Cook. I'll see you, presently, in the kitchen."

Cook, snorting violently, departed. My Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly stood still and gazed upon the copper-coloured back of Mr. Rummery's neck.

V

After many minutes she spoke :

"Rummery !"

"Marm ?" cried Mr. Rummery, turning about and saluting.

"Are *you* a cannibal, Rummery ?" demanded my Aunt Elizabeth Pengelly.

"Marm ?" repeated Mr. Rummery.

"Are you a cannibal, Rummery ?" said my Aunt Elizabeth.

Mr. Rummery shook his head. "Me father were a Buffalo," said Mr. Rummery, "and 'is father before um ; but I be too pore for sich games."

"Do you eat your fellow-creatures, Rummery ?" persisted my Aunt Elizabeth.

"On'y a little park, marm," responded Mr. Rummery. "I be extraordinary partial to park. I beant one for meat at all, not in a proper manner o' speakin', on'y vegetable and park. I be too pore to eat much flesh at all, on'y park, what moi young darter cook for me. Moi darter, she *can* cook park."

My Aunt Elizabeth turned from him with a laugh and went into her cottage, where she soon surrounded herself with carpet dust.

Mr. Rummery continued to tie and untie roses until the clock struck one, when he hobbled across the road to *his* cottage, where he ate three large bacon dumplings which his daughter had cooked in their hot little kitchen.

"You be to run over to the cross-roads now," said Mr. Rummery to his daughter, when he had eaten the dumplings, "and 'elp your pore auntie with her washing."

Mr. Rummery then returned across the silent road to my Aunt Pengelly's garden, where the birds still sang of liberty.

XXII

A FISHERMAN'S STORY

I BOUGHT for two shillings in Blowfield a stout old turnip watch in a copper case. This I exhibited with some pride to Young Thomas, who was gapping a hedge on my estate.

“ ’Tis a quare old set-out, and that’s a sure thing,” observed Young Thomas gracefully. “ It remind me of a similar old set-out what belong to me Gran’fer Davey as lived in they cottages be Pedlar’s Rest. ’Ow’s this for a watch, then ? ”

Young Thomas produced from his pocket an old glove containing a roll of linen, which comprehended a calico bag, which contained a wash-leather bag, which contained a watch—a watch of genuine, stamped gold-finish, emitting an unparalleled shine. “ ’Ow’s this, then ? ” repeated Young Thomas : “ they makes a different watch to-day, then, to what was made in they olden times. When this watch be going, that go so silent you can ’ardly ’ear the tick of it. But they old sort, they gives out a noise like cutting chaff, which well

I know ; for me Gran'fer Davey he 'ad a similar old set-out what he would make us listen to for pleasure when we was little ones. 'Tis a different class of thing entirely what they makes to-day," declared Young Thomas, with undoubted truth. " See the shine of it : see how thin that be : see the pretty letters on the face. That's a wonderful good time-keeper, when that be going any sense."

With this final laudation, Young Thomas reinserted his treasure in the leather bag, and returned the leather bag to the calico bag, and the calico bag to its bandage, and the bandage to the glove, and the glove to his pocket. " I won this watch for a prize," added Thomas, " that come out in a paper. There was some pictures printed of the King, and Gen'ral Kitchener, and the German Kayser, and 'Ackenschmidt. And anybody what fancied 'isself could go in for it. The puzzle was to find out the right names for the right pictures, and put them underneath, and send them in with five shillin' entrance money. I got a good memory for faces ; so I joined the competition and filled up all the names correct and won the watch. I was one of the lucky ones."

" That's the new-fashioned way of getting a watch," I said, for the sake of saying some-

thing. "They did not distribute watches in that New England manner at the time when this was made."

"Not they," assented Thomas, with a suggestion of pity rather than contempt in his voice. "Times are changed as well as watches."

I took off the old watch's overcoat and showed his "movement" to Young Thomas: I begged him particularly to observe the little fairy-chain of fine wrought steel, by means of which the power from his spring was transmitted to the lower organs of his body. I begged my young friend to consider the infinite delicacies of this manual product and to reflect that after a hundred years of strenuous, persistent labour, the queer old watch required no treatment more elaborate than an application of oil to make it set to work again, and tick off the seconds and minutes and hours and days and years with unfailing accuracy and vim.

"Yes," assented Thomas, "'tis a artful old set-out and remind me of a similar old curiosity what belonged to me Gran'fer Davey. Him what used to make the baskets. That was a uglier old watch than what this be, an' made more n'ise. I dessay that would be

worth some money now. Me Gran'fer Davey, he used it for a alarm to wake 'isself up to go fishun of a morning."

"No doubt," I hazarded, "he made use of the chaff-cutting effect?"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir?" said Thomas.

"How did he produce the alarm?" I said.

"You see," explained Young Thomas, slowly wiping his swab-hook, "me Gran'fer Davey and me Gran'mo'er, they never could agree about the fishun. Me Gran'mo'er she say that the proper place for a married man at fower in the morning were in bed along of his wife. But me Gran'fer he would go fishun. And Gran'mo'er at last she say that the old gentleman he better sleep elsewhere if he wanten goo fishun: not go stompin' about like a steam-engine when she be dreamin' o' the Scriptures at daybreak. And Gran'fer he say that he will sleep on the sofa in the parlour, and Gran'mo'er she say so he can, for all *she* care. And Gran'fer say she got to call him, then, in time, so's he can git up early and goo out fishun. And Gran'mo'er say, 'My God, no: you sleep be yeself; you can wake be yeself.'

"So Gran'fer he took and made 'isself this alarm what I speak of. He sets a penny edge-

wise on the corner of the parlour mantelpiece, and he sticks a dab o' wax agen it, so as that'll just stand up. And he fasten a match-stick to the hour-'and of his watch, and 'e sets the watch agin the penny, so that the match-stick 'll strike it when the hour-'and touches fower. And he gets a little table and me Gran'mo'er's china candlesticks, and 'e sets the candlesticks upon the table, and the table underneath the penny, and he sets a old tin tray upon the candlesticks, so's that will jest balance of itself. And he goo to bed.

“And in the morning, when the hour-'and come to fower o'clock, the match-stick at the the end of it, that strike the penny, which topple over and strike the tray, and the tray that topple over and make a clatter. And the china candlesticks they toppled over, too, and git broke, which was more than me Gran'fer had aimed for.

“But that woke him to the minute. And he goo out fishun.”

XXIII

TOMMY SNOOKS AND BESSY BROOKS

As Tommy Snooks and Bessie Brooks were walking out one Sunday, says Tommy Snooks to Bessie Brooks, "To-morrow will be Monday."

Bessie's response is not recorded in the picture-books ; but I happen to know what it was. She murmured, "'Mm !"

"'Mm !" was a favourite observation with Bessie ; and for that matter, with Thomas as well. They accompanied each other to school in the mornings, these two, and they came home together every night. They went twice to church on Sundays, hand in hand, and they came twice home again, also holding hands. Their homes adjoined each other.

So that when you come to think about it, "'Mm" was about the only thing they could say. "Aht be gallus coold thes marnin'," Bessie would occasionally venture during the schoolward journey, or "Aht be gallus 'ot" (according, you will understand, to the incidence of the seasons), and Thomas would say, "'Mm !" And Thomas, the infrequency of

whose utterances gave to them a special charm, would presently give expression to some thought of his own, similar in truth and accuracy to that recorded in the books. "They postesses be newly tarred," is the sort of sudden, unexpected reflection which would present itself to Thomas. And Thomas's unfailing friend and confidant might be relied upon to offer her assent to this proposition in the usual manner.

There came a time, of course, when the village school-house ceased to be attended either by Tommy or by Bessie. They "passed out," as the saying goes, on the same day and upon the same day they passed in—passed into another sort of school where the teachers were nicknamed, variously, "Experience," "Tribulation," "Success," or "Folly," and where the prizes were distributed with a prodigal hand, and were also variously disguised, reaching you, as a rule, with great suddenness on the back of your neck.

The particular branch attended by Thomas and Bessie when first they entered this great, new school was presided over by a gentleman named Timms. And that knowledge of hard subjects which Mr. Timms could not impart to people was scarcely worth the learning.

The particular and especial subject dealt with by Professor Timms was chair-making in all its branches. And that erudite gentleman possessed few pupils more silent and industrious than Thomas who turned his chair-legs and Elizabeth who varnished them.

Silence, indeed, was the outstanding feature of Mr. Timms's establishment. A visitor to his chair-shed—let us drop the embarrassing allegory of the Professorship—would be chiefly and most arrestingly impressed by the horrible stillness of the place. Of the mechanical noises there were enough and to spare. The chair-shed, indeed, gave up a positive roar from the voice of industry, which drew its notes from pole-lathe, saw, hammer, anvil, every infernal thing which was made to buzz or clang or clash. But through it all the hum of human speech was strangely absent ; so that the sudden sound of some faint voice commanding some faint figure to “ Moind my bloody thumb ! ” would strike upon your ear in that thick tumult like a loud cry from the sea.

It is to be supposed, however, that the men and women, and boys and girls who worked for Mr. Timms did not possess the sorts of soul to be affrighted by this feature of their daily

environment. Thomas Snooks, for instance, as he bent over his pole-lathe—pushing, pushing, pushing with his foot, digging, digging with his chisel, watching with his eye—appeared to be free not only from the emotion of horror, but also from any other emotion, human or animal.

The pole-lathe, which was invented by a native of Syria some two thousand years before the advent of Christ, and which is considered by the Buckinghamshire chairmakers to be a very modern and useful appliance, is not in itself a noisy instrument. The shed where Thomas worked was solely occupied by lathe-men and varnishers, so that amid the gentle purring produced by the joint efforts of these operatives, conversation would not be merely possible, but even helpful. But every lathe-worker, even as Thomas, begrudged his breath to idle speech ; and this in spite of the fact that every lathe-worker, even as Thomas, was stationed in proximity to a maiden. The maidens did the varnishing.

Thomas's varnisher was "simple" anyhow ; so perhaps she didn't count. But Thomas's own particular young woman, Elizabeth Brooks to wit, was stationed within easy

speaking range by the side of the very next lathe. And yet Thomas would exchange no word with her from the beginning unto the ending of every long day's work. It should, however, be noted (in partial mitigation of this strange conduct) that "'Mm!" is not a word which one need trouble to exchange in business hours.

And perhaps this unnatural habit of reserve during the week days had a certain method in it, for it must surely have added a sort of piquancy to the united promenade of the Sunday. For this strange young couple, who slept next door to each other at night, who worked side by side during the day time, and who yet uttered no word of conversation during all the weary hours of the working week, would solemnly meet upon the Sunday and clasp each other round the small of the back in an embrace peculiar to their kind, and pace the sylvan lanes together throughout the live-long Sabbath.

Upon these occasions, of course, their tacit rule of silence would be relaxed. Mr. Snooks, after lengthy inward preparation, would give utterance to some conviction or idea—probably of a meteorological character—and Miss Brooks would respond with an "'Mm!" of

assent. And when Miss Brooks, after similarly profound cogitation, gave expression to her belief that the surrounding grass was ripe for the reaper, her Thomas would confirm that belief by means of a similar exclamation. And all this time they would be holding waists and holding hands, and looking each into the face of the other with an expression of great tolerance. So they would walk on—if you can call it walking: the movement fluctuates between a crawl and a hop, and is locally termed “a otchle.” And as they walked they would meet and exchange nods with a number of other couples, who lived as they did, who worked as they did, who thought as they did, who talked as they did, who loved as they did.

One Sunday, as they walked out, Thomas gave forth yet another utterance which is not recorded in the picture-books. Said he: “Oi’ve a-touched the twanty!”

“’Mm?” remarked Bessie.

“And so,” pursued Thomas, “we’ll make it Michaelmas.”

Again Elizabeth said “’Mm!” And then Elizabeth delivered an observation on her own account.

“Oi got a matter o’ noine-pun-ten meself,”

said she, "an' there'll be mother's 'surance—when mother goos."

"Ah!" responded Thomas. "'Aht'll be twanty-noine-pun-ten, than!"

"And there'll be mother's 'surance money," reiterated Bessie.

"'Mm!" said Thomas.

For some months after their marriage, Bessie continued to work in the chair-shed. It saved her from feeling lonely ("wi' nobody to talk to an' thaht"). Besides, the money was a consideration. In really busy weeks, she brought home as much as six and seven shillings. And so things went on much as before, even to the Sunday walk and the Sunday talk.

But presently the time arrived when Bessie was physically incapacitated from applying varnish to chair-legs. She took to her bed. And Thomas came home one evening to find a neighbour woman frying onions for his supper in their living-room. So Thomas walked upstairs, where "the trouble" was; and he stood by his wife's bedside. She put forth her hand—a hand which was stained a bright red-brown from the varnishing—and touched his arm. "'Aht be twins," said Bessie.

“ ’Mm ! ” said Thomas. And he went out into the garden and dug up a double quantity of potatoes. His views as to the requirements of the situation were vague ; but he was hazily conscious of an impression that twins would cost one something to keep up.

It was shortly after the appearance of the twins that Thomas made his domestic debut in the capacity of a drunkard. She hit him with a chair-spindle and called him foul names, and he slunk abjectly bed-wards. And in the morning she applied a mixture of lard and tears to the lump which she had raised. When Thomas, some weeks later, again came home in a state of intoxication, she tried to repeat the treatment ; but he pushed her out of doors and locked it ; so that she took cold. And ever afterwards you might know of Mr. Snooks’s backslidings, for they showed themselves either in a lump upon Mr. Snooks’s forehead (which was a token merely of the “ glass too much ”—a comparatively venial wickedness), or when Mr. Snooks’s sin had taken the form of a downright orgy in the snufflings of his wife. But, after all, it is something (as the Snookses go) that he did not beat her.

After the appearance of the twins, it goes

without saying that the attendances of Elizabeth at the chair-shed were permanently discontinued. The twins were followed by other offspring, singly and in pairs. Elizabeth fed and clothed them all to the best of the means at her disposal, which says that they grew long but silent, like their parents. Whenever a new baby was born, Thomas would lay down more potatoes ; whenever a baby died, he would say, " 'Mm ! "

But upon things and events in general he said less than ever. The pole-lathe stimulated one's taste for silence, and there was much to do in the garden, besides repairing the family boots.

Also, Thomas did not neglect his duties as a citizen. Elections happened, off and on, and gentlemen waited upon Thomas at his garden gate and uttered appeals to his intelligence.

" Vote for Pipkin and Imperial Unity ! " the gentleman with the true-blue literature would say. " *You* are not the man to stand by and see us driven out of Polynesia by the Germans ! "

And Thomas, very naturally, would answer, " 'Mm ! "

" Tinkler is *your* man, my fine fellow," was

the assurance offered to him by the gentleman who came round with the yellow bills. "We are for keeping down the income-tax and curtailing waste, and for disestablishment and Peace."

And again our Thomas's response would be an "'Mm!'"

But when the actual day of election came, it was Elizabeth, combined with his own nice sense of what was due to him, who would settle his convictions for him: "You goo down to Petterling in a baker's cart!" she would cry, pointing a scornful finger at him as he stood there in his Sunday "blacks"—"You goo down in a baker's cart alung of Will Parkis an' them Milishy buys; an' you gin up a marnin's wark an' all! Shame on ye for a pimmicky fool! Can't yew boide patient for a minute, then, whoile the ganelman comes back along o' the yaller moty-car? Boide patient, now, an' goo yew down decent! Baker's cart, indeed!"

And Thomas, saying "'Mm!'" would curb his zeal and wait on for the motor-car, and vote accordingly.

In the meantime, Elizabeth grew grey, and developed a comic complaint called "spasims"; and Thomas developed a ludicrous style of

walking, a sort of shuffle from the knee downwards, as he plodded to and from the chairshed. And Thomas's children grew and grew, walking silently by twos to the school, launching at rare intervals into comments upon the obvious, and receiving the same with monosyllabic "'Mms.'" Thus one sees that what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.

Here, properly speaking, the history of the Brookses and the Snookses cometh to an end ; for we have reached that critical period in their fortunes which the play-bills describe as "present-day." But having had an extensive acquaintanceship with other Snookses and other Brookses, I feel myself able to forecast the future of this particular couple. It is an uncomplicated future, and seems chiefly to be distinguished by neatly kept gravel and a set of wrought-iron railings, most "ornate" in design. Bessie, attired in a blue cape and a grey skirt, stands upon one side of the railings, and Tommy, in a funny blue jacket and yellow trousers, upon the other. Bessie speaks :

"Yes," says she, "there be bacon-dumping, Sundays."

"'Mm ?" exclaimeth Thomas. "There be 'bacca 'pon our soide."

“ Yew an’ yewr ’bacca ! ” says the woman.
“ ’Mm ! ”

“ Yew an’ yer bacon,” responds the man, a little obviously. . . . Then, with an air of bright conviction : “ To-morrer will be Sunday. “ ’*Mm* ! ”

XXIV

JENNER

THE author of this work has already hinted that he inhabits a picturesque cottage, situated in Sussex. It is not generally known, however, that his enjoyment of this property is shared in perpetuity by a Mr. Jenner. By an awful, ceaseless Mr. Jenner, who is a sort of unholy ghost—invisible, inaudible; the whole incomprehensible.

My original introduction to Jenner was performed by Mr. Tracey—a local horticulturist of some standing who, having represented in convincing terms his ability to convert the wilderness attached to this cottage into a “proper, antikew, le’l genelman’s garden,” was engaged, for an indefinite period, to perform that miracle. Mr. Tracey, during his first day’s work and whilst occupied in disinterring pot-lids and kettles from a tin-mine which then existed on the property, thus broached the subject of Jenner.

“I wonder,” said Mr. Tracey, “what old Jenner would think of all this?”

“ Ah ! ” I murmured, not wishing to display my ignorance of local history.

“ Not much, I expect,” continued Mr. Tracey.

“ Oh ! ” I exclaimed, with anxious wonder.

“ ’Twas old Jenner,” exclaimed Mr. Tracey, “ as made this garden what it be.”

What this garden at that moment be was an unsightly and extensive refuse-heap, adorned in places by parched, neglected, blighted fruit trees. Even the elaborately organised kettle-beds were mildewed and weed-bound. A prolonged survey of old Jenner’s performance left me quite without enthusiasm.

“ Old Jenner,” mused Mr. Tracey, “ was the sort of good old gardener they don’t make these days. ’E on’y got one eye. A most respectable man in every way. ’E built this cottage. I knowed ’im well.”

“ But this cottage,” I pointed out, “ was built in the reign of Queen Anne.”

“ Ah ! ” said Mr. Tracey, “ very likely.”

“ In that case,” I urged, “ Mr. Jenner would have to be about one hundred and eighty years old when you knew him.”

“ He was very old,” said Mr. Tracey.

"So old as all that, do you think?" I submitted.

"Well," observed Mr. Tracey, "'is son died on'y the other day, and 'e was nigh sixty. Per'aps, when you come to think it over, I be got confused in me mind, and 'twas the son as built this place. That would bring it back to about the time you mention."

I did not see by what process of reasoning Mr. Tracey arrived at this result. But I preferred to leave his arithmetic as I found it, rather than institute a propaganda at that moment. For, mind you, I employed this person: why should he study arithmetic in *my* time?

Nothing more was heard of Mr. Jenner for the rest of that day; but he reappeared again the following afternoon, when a small, red-whiskered man accosted me on the high road, saying:

"I beg ye're pardon, young man, but be you the party what have rented Jenner's?"

"No," I replied.

"Well, now," commented Whiskers, "then I bin told a lie. And yet—and yet you be surely the young party what was pointed out to me: the same funny walk and all. 'Tis the le'l old cottage long in Sludge Lane what I

speak of. Ain't you rented that, young man ? ”

“ Sir,” I replied, “ it is true that I have acquired Stone Cottage in Sludge Lane. But I do not call it by the name of ‘ Jenner’s.’ What has Jenner to do with me ? ”

“ ’E got this much to do with you, young man,” responded Whiskers : “ There wouldn’t be no le’l old cottage ’long in Sludge Lane, save for this Jenner what rooted it all with ’is own ’and and planted the medlar tree. What would Jenner’s be without the medlar tree ? ”

“ But there is not a medlar tree,” I protested.

“ There is, then,” said Whiskers. “ ’Cos ole Jenner, ’e planted it, and me own old father ’e *seed* ’im plant it. That was afore *your* time, young man.”

“ At any rate, I have never seen the medlar tree.”

“ I’ll lay you *’ave*, then,” responded Whiskers : “ on’y more than likely you took it for a quince. ’Tisn’t everybody as know a medlar tree when they see one. I don’t believe there be a finer crop of medlars in the parish than them what old Jenner raises. Well I remember ’im in ’is old blue coat. ’E was lame of one leg.”

“ And partially blind ? ” I hazarded.

“ Not ’im ! ” responded Whiskers hotly. “ ’Tis the son you be a-thinkin’ of, unless it be the uncle. Jenner ’isself could see as well as me. ’Twas ’im what planted the medlar : *that* was never planted by no blind man. But the son—or else the uncle—’e *was* blind, for many’s the time I’ve heard my father speak of it, ’e ’avin’ blinded ’im ’is very own self, crossing Potter’s stile with a shot-gun. But whether ’twas the son or whether ’twas the uncle I don’t exackly know : but whichever that be, ’twas the same as put in they winter apple trees.”

“ But,” I submitted, “ those winter apples are said to be as old as the cottage.”

“ Ah ! ” said Whiskers : “ and older ! ”

“ ’Tis a good job I met you,” continued Whiskers : “ for I was goin’ along to ‘ Jenner’s ’ in the ’opes I *should* meet you : in the matter of your ’edges and ditches. You be recommended to me as ’avin’ arst for a good ’edger and ditcher.”

“ Go along to ‘ Johnson’s,’ ” I responded, “ and ask for Mr. Tracey. Tell him that if he sees fit to employ you he has my permission to do so.”

“ Ah,” said Whiskers : “ old Tom Tracey.

I know. 'Tis ' Jenner's,' I suppose, you mean. I'll say ' so long ! ' then."

I went about my business in the village calmly and without fear. It had not yet occurred to me that I was haunted. This knowledge came to me that very morning : for I was waited upon by a Mrs. Pett (you have met her before, with her little fat basket) who came to seek the office of " housekeeper." Having made certain inquiries, Mrs. Pett appointed herself to the post in these words : " Five shillings, eh ? Ah well : I daresay I can oblige." Then, with wet eyes and a faltering accent, she made the following speech :

" 'Tis a funny le'l old place, to be sure. I could almost fancy, comin' up the road, as I seed old Jenner 'isself a-standin' at the gate. 'E made that gate 'isself with some wood what my old father give 'im."

" On the contrary," I asserted, " that is a brand-new gate, made to my order by a steam engine in Norway."

Mrs. Pett inspected the gate. " I see, now," she said at last, " as this be new. 'Tis a flimsy sort of thing, don't you think, sir ? But, then, they don't make gates at all in these days, not to say gates. My man is allus saying as nobody can make a gate same as old Jenner

could. Such a nice old man that be : a great chapel-goer, and stone-deaf."

I peremptorily closed Mrs. Pett, and strode into the garden, hoping to encounter just cause for having a row with Mr. Tracey, but Mr. Tracey was peaceably lunching off bread and cucumber. With him was Whiskers similarly occupied. And Whiskers was relating a sad incident from the life of Mr. Jenner.

Mr. Jenner, it seems, had disinherited a son—or else it was a nephew—who had revenged himself by stealing into the garden at dead of night and "barking" the old man's favourite fruit trees, with the result that they wilted and died. Whiskers, I believe, had recollected this story in order to explain the evident absence of the medlar tree ; but to me the history was interesting, as proving that Mr. Jenner—or somebody else of the same name—had really existed. It was so obviously a true story, so thoroughly in accord with the fine old English ideal of "the family."

Not wishing to obtrude upon the well-earned repose of these worthy men, I retreated to the house ; but was soon fetched back again by the sound of a violent altercation.

Whiskers, who had risen to his feet, was threatening Mr. Tracey with a formidable length of cucumber. "I tell you 'twas old Jenner 'isself," cried Whiskers.

"And I tell *you* 'twas 'is son," retorted Mr. Tracey.

"I suppose my father never went to school with Jenner, then? Nor went a-courtin' with 'im? Nor stood as a witness to the first boy's christening? I tell you 'twas *old* Jenner as built the place; and likewise put the trees in—at least they *was* trees them days, afore any novices 'ad the prunin' of 'em."

"'Twas his son," repeated Mr. Tracey. "And if you call me ere another name I'll knock ye're ribs in!"

"'Twas old Jenner, I tell you," persisted Whiskers.

"I say 'twas Jenner's son," said Mr. Tracey. "If 'twas old Jenner, same as you will 'ave it, he would have to be a hunderd and eighty year old day of 'is death. I be surprised a man o' your schooling don't see that for 'isself."

"I don't care nothing about old Jenner's age," responded Whiskers. "You can call 'im any age you like. All I tell you is this: old Jenner built that cottage. Aye," added

Whiskers, warming to his theme, "and I'll tell you somethink else : old Jenner 'e likewise built the first cottage what stood on this spot : the old original cottage. When that wore out, 'e put up this one. If anybody arst who tell you that, let you say as 'Arry 'Opkins tell you, what knowed old Jenner well—'im and 'is old blue coat."

I had had a surfeit of Jenner by this time. I went for a walk on the Downs. I walked all night. When, at the first sign of dawn, I staggered home, who should accost me but the ancient postman.

"Ah, now," pipes this dotard, "you be making things shipshape up at 'Jenner's,' I see. What with they arches and the pleasure-lawn and that, 'tis the same as if Jenner 'isself was come back."

"You are mistaken," I said. "Old Jenner grew cabbages and pigs."

"That's right," assented the postman : "and pleasure lawns and arches also. That pear tree of 'is be the first in the village to this day."

I crawled on home to bed. At noon I got up. I stood at my gate of Norway deal and was greeted by an offensive tax-collector, who was riding by on a fat pony. The tax-collector,

mind you : a greasy rascal who levies a lamp and pavement rate, but gives me neither lamp nor pavement. This person waved an oily palm at me and said :

“ Good morning, Mr. Jenner.”

XXV

MR. MULLINGER'S JOKE

"THAHT Mullinger," said Gran'fer Askell, who explained the joke to me, "thaht Mullinger 'e be a rare one for 'is fun." Which statement I can myself endorse, having had the happiness to strike up an acquaintance-ship with Mr. Mullinger when I was collecting wild-flowers from a wood, within the precincts of which certain pheasants in the charge of Mr. Mullinger chanced at that moment to be nesting. I noticed, upon that occasion, what a funny man he was.

I was not, therefore, wholly surprised to be told by Gran'fer Askell that Woodman Joice had classified this good and faithful servant as "a red-bearded, 'Ampsheer-born something!" He is.

"Aht arl come about," said Gran'fer Askell, pursuing his explanation of "The Joke," "aht arl come about along o' Woodman Jice bein' took sick wi' pains at 'is innards. Oi seed 'um day afoor the fit come on, an' 'e weer otchlin' along among they saplin's 'lung oover be Bethlehem Hill theer, wheer the Noo

Plantation be. An' when oi drared neer 'um, oi could see be the look on 'um, oi could, as aht be unkid bahd wi' 'um. But whather 'tweer the groipes insoide on 'um, or whather 'tweer they keepers' wickednesses what drored 'is chin up so, oi never roightly knowed. 'E be unkid bahd thaht day, at anny vents. Oh dear! an' oh pray! The words as aht man used. Oi be no mute meself, mester, come to thaht. But Woodman Jice 'e be cleverer nor ever oi knowed 'ow to be. Hee, pray! 'Tweer good's a mericle to 'ear 'un!

“ ‘The red-bearded, 'Ampsheer-born somethink,' says 'e. 'Look theer, Gran'fer,' 'e says, 'look theer at moi nettin'. Theer's bin a keeper '—'keeper' wi' a B, mester!—'theer's bin a keeper messin' oover wi' 'is feet'—'feet' wi' a B, mester!—'theer's bin a keeper messin' oover wi' 'is feet,' says 'e, 'an' aht'll take a fortnight '—'fortnight' wi' B, K, G, an' arl the blessed alf'bet, mester—'to put thengs roight,' says 'e. 'An' aht'll be thaht Mullinger,' 'e says, 'for sartin,' says 'e, 'case oi could pick the ugly footprints of 'is dahm great feet out of ten thousand,' says 'e, 'they bein' the crookedest dahm thengs in Buckinghamsheer,' says 'e. 'The red-bearded, 'Ampsheer-born somethink!' 'e says.

“An’ whather ’tweer the pain insoide ’is stomach, or whather ’tweer the thought o’ Mullinger, ’is face drored up thaht wonnerful you’d ’a’ thowt ’e be dooin’ it to startle crows. ‘Look theer at moi nettin’,’ says ’e. ‘Look theer, wheer the corner’s all stove in an’ the top broke off! Ever yew see a keeper yat as could move ’isself about same’s ef ’e didn’t be the ’oind-lags of a blassed elephant? Ever yew see a keeper yat as could step oover a theng, same’s *men* do? Ever yew know a keeper as didn’t rip, an’ ’ack, an’ tear, an’ smash at every tree, an’ shoot, an’ branch as come ’is way? . . . The red-bearded, ’Ampsheer-born somethink!’ ’e says.

“‘What you thenk ’e say to me this marnin’? “Squoire’s arders,” ’e say, “an’ you’f to take an’ clear a patch o’ they larch poles be the Middle Plantation,” says ’e, “so’s the gorse can grow an’ make cover for the foxes,” ’e say.

“‘Aht’s what ’e said to me. Begahd, ’e did. “*Larch poles*,” ’e says—the red-bearded swine—meanin’ moi ten-year shoots, what weer laid down the turn o’ the century be me meself—me an’ moi men. *Cover for ’is foxes*—the ’Ampsheer-born sot. Oi ’im toold dahm queck wheer ’e could go

for cover—aht oi ded. Aye, an' oi toold 'im as 'e could take 'is stinkin' foxes an' 'is dirty gun along wi' 'um, oi did. *Larch poles!*' says Woodman Jice; 'larch poles!'

"An' 'e otchled along wi' 'is chin drard up, an' 'is knees a-knockin', an' 'is yad a-waggin', an' 'e shook 'is oold blackthorn up into the skoi, 'e did, same's ef 'e rackoned to see ole Mullinger theer, 'ackin' down the clouds for cover.

"An' what wi' thenkin' on oold Mullinger, an' what wi' groipes an' what arl, th' oold faller got took bahd, 'e did. An' they layed 'im up a-bed for noigh a fortnight.

"So theer 'e lay. An' one foin day I goes a walk, oi does, lung be Waterpark an' Plum Tree Lane. An' as oi'm otchlin' lung theer be Middle Plantation, what should oi see but Keeper Mullinger an' arl 'is men, 'lung wi' couple o' fairrm 'ands, an' a lot o' fellin' tackle—ropes, an' saws, an' 'atchets, an' that. An' when 'e seed me, ole Mullinger, as be a rare one for 'is fun, 'e look at me sulemn. 'We'se lendin' a 'and to Woodman Jice,' says 'e: ''tendin' to 'is dooties whoilst 'e come bahk agen.'

"An' Mullinger's men, an' fairrm lahds, an' oi, we laughed ourselves silly. But thaht oold

Mullinger, thoo a rare blook for 'is fun, 'e never laughed. An' 'im an' is men, they cleared away foive acre—which be noigh on airrf the Plantation.

“ ‘ R ! ’ says oold Mullinger, when job was done at and of a s'enoight or soo, ‘ R ! ’ 'e say, ‘ thes'll soot oold Jice a treat,’ says 'e. ‘ 'E was allus a rare one,’ 'e say, ‘ for fencin' an' that. Oi racken theer's fencin' enough theer to reach from yare to Wandoover.’

“ An' wi' thaht 'e walk away. An' praesently 'e come bahk agen wi' a le'l droi, red stick in 'is 'ahnd, what 'e breathed on an' polished, very keerful an' *parteckler*.

“ So oi say to 'um, oi say : ‘ Mester Mullinger,’ oi say, ‘ what be thaht in yewr 'ahnd—thaht le'l droi, red steck theer ? ’

“ ‘ Thaht ? ’ 'e says. ‘ Oh, thaht be nar-think much—jest a bit o' dead tweg loik what oi pecked orfen a oold dead tree what lays in the park at Tottenden 'All: Ever you 'eerd o' Mester Gladstone,’ says 'e, ‘ 'im what belong to Parleyment, an' stopped the sodeger's beer ? ’

“ ‘ Oi heerd tell o' the genelman ! ’ says oi.

“ ‘ Well,’ says Mr. Mullinger, ‘ thes yare droid-up oold tree,’ says 'e, ‘ thaht was cut down be Mester Gladstone. So they kep it

theer to thes day—makes a sorter objec' of et, they do. An' so, bein' a frand, as yew moight say, to Woodman Jice, oi lops arf this le'l tweg yare to give 'um for a prasant,' says 'e.

“ ‘What'll 'e do wi' ut ? ’ oi says.

“ ‘Do wi' ut ? ’ says Mr. Mullinger. ‘Ow the 'ull should *oi* know ? . . . Oi thowt it 'ud do to aggerivate 'um.'

“ Mester Mullinger 'e be a rare one for 'is fun.

“ But that theer joke of the le'l droi, red steck, it never come to nowt.

“ Fust day oold Woodman Jice come outer bad, oi goos a wark wi' 'um—bein' neighbours, loike. ‘We'se goo lung be Meddle Plantation,' says oi. An' 'e nods 'is yad. I thowt then as 'e be a soight less loively in 'is manner nor aver afoor oi'd seed 'um. 'E weer arkid loike, an' sleepy—same's a man what's shipped a pint.

“ An' when we come be Plum Tree Lane, an' Mester Mullinger otchled up, oold Jice 'e never so much as 'peared to see 'um. An' when oold Mullinger 'e give 'um oover the le'l droi, red stick what I spoke about, 'e never so much as 'peared to see *thaht* neether.

“ ‘Aht be a steck from Belly Gladstone's elum,' says Mester Mullinger. ‘I browt it wi'

me,' 'e says, 'arl the way from Tottenden 'All,' says 'e, 'for to gev yew for a prasent. Aht was 'is 'obby, aht was—cuttin' trees down. 'E weer 'andy at it, too.'

" 'Aye,' says Woodman Jice, 'I 'eerd tell on 'um. 'E was a *selly* oold somethink !' An' wi' that 'e throos the le'l droi, red steck be'oind 'um, an' otchles on. An' Mester Mullinger 'e lairrfed !

" Soo, prasinly, we makes the bend, an' Woodman Jice 'e gets a soight at the Meddle Plantation, what loies beyand. An' noigh on yairrf on et was cleared an' bare, wi' larch poles lyin' all ways all about it, same's the 'air upon a love-sick tom-cat. An' Woodman Jice 'e draps 'is stick.

" 'Aht be Meddle Plantation oover yander !' 'e say.

" 'Aye !' says oi, as could yairrdly speak for lairrfin', 'aye !' says oi, 'aht be Meddle Plantings, sure enough. They cleared it arf for cover for the foxes.'

" 'Aye !' says 'e.

" An' 'e pecks up 'is oold blackthorn, an' otchles on. 'Thaht be Meddle Plantings,' says 'e agen, when we come close. 'Oi weer sixty-eight,' says 'e, 'the day we finished settin' it.' An' 'e otchles on.

“ When we come up to the Plantings, ’e begun to show ’is temper—kickin’ at stumps an’ thaht wi’ ’is foot, an’ drorin’ ’is face up somethink unkid, same’s oi toold yew. Then ’e lean down to the ground, ’e do, an’ sets to feelin’ at the stumps an’ stubble, an’ scratchin’ at the bits o’ gorse, an’ that.

“ ‘ This be Meddle Plantings,’ says ’e—stoopid loike.

“ An’ then ’is temper gets the upper ’and. ’Is legs come over wobberly, same’s the toime oi toold yew, when oi seed ’um be the nettin’s. An’ ’e wagged ’is chin, an’ shook ’is selly oold fist, an’ says, all quivery :

“ ‘ The red-bearded, ’Ampsheer-born some-think ! ’ ’e say.

“ An’ wi’ that ’e lets ’is choildish temper loose. An’ ’e throwed up ’is oold blackthorn into the yair ; an’ ’e throwed ’isself to earth. And according and in consequence ’is airrm come oover withered. . . .

“ Such a selly oold mahn !

“ An’ no one dursn’t so much as whesper ‘ Meddle Plantings ’ to ’um, even now. . . . Hee, pray ! Yew airst Mester Mullinger. ’E’ll tell yew. . . . Rare one for ’is jook be Mester Mullinger.”

XXVI

A DEAL

JACK O' CLUBS, the rascal tally-man, is out on the road again. I met him at Sly Corner.

He was accompanied by a set of harness, a tax-cart, and his brother Ben. Jack pulled the cart and Ben pushed it. The harness sat inside.

"Good arternoon to *you*, sir," said Jack o' Clubs. "Can I sell you a le'l ole-fashioned butter-tub, sir?"

"Not to-day," I replied.

"Can I sell you a le'l ole-fashioned carving-knife, sir? A real antikew le'l piece, sir?"

"Not to-day," I repeated.

"Can I sell you a le'l ole pair o' garden shears?" persisted Jack o' Clubs.

"Or a real ole-fashioned lid orf a warming-pan?" added brother Ben.

"I am penniless. You can sell me nothing," I replied decisively.

"Then," said brother Ben, "can I carry your basket, sir?"

"It seems to me," I suggested, "that you have enough to carry as it is."

“Not be no manner o’ means,” said Jack o’ Clubs. “Can we give you a lift, sir?”

Not wishing to be mistaken for a circus or a slave owner, I declined this offer. There followed a brief silence, broken by Jack o’ Clubs, who said suggestively: “Whene’er you finished with that cigarette end, sir, jes’ take an’ throw it into moi le’l ole cart here.”

We accordingly struck a bargain in cigarettes, and I walked along by the side of Jack and Ben until we came to the cross-roads. Here we should have parted; but Mr. William Dunn, who farms the Cross Roads farm, happened to be standing at his gate, and it appeared that we all had business to do with Mr. Dunn—I as a purchaser of eggs, and Jack o’ Clubs (with whom was his learned brother Ben) in his capacity as horse-dealer.

Jack o’ Clubs having performed a ceremonious salute, approached the farmer sideways, wearing a look of anxiety.

“That be a nice, long-eared bitch you got there, Mr. Dunn,” said Jack o’ Clubs.

“Ah!” said Mr. Dunn.

“I aren’t never see a prettier le’l bitch in this parish,” continued Jack o’ Clubs.

“Nor in this county,” added his brother.

“Ah!” said Mr. Dunn.

"She don't bite, I reckon," mused Jack o' Clubs, to which supposition the farmer offered no comment.

"Not 'er!" cried brother Ben. "She be one o' they 'igh-bred, good-tempered sorts."

"She *look* a good-tempered sort," assented Jack o' Clubs.

"Ah!" said Mr. Dunn.

"Good dog!" cried Jack o' Clubs. "Pretty lady! Whoa, me lady! Pretty lady! Will you call 'er in, sir?"

"Ah," said Mr. Dunn, "when I've a mind to."

"A nice, long-'eaded dog," murmured Jack o' Clubs.

"That *be* a dog," assented brother Ben.

"Beggin' yere pardon, sir," continued Jack o' Clubs, "I be wishful to speak to you, Mr. Dunn."

"Speak up, then," said Mr. Dunn.

Jack o' Clubs advanced one inch, looking sideways at the nice, long-headed dog.

"Dog won't interfere with you . . . so long as you don't move," said Farmer Dunn. "Speak up."

"I come about that le'l roan cob of yourn," said Jack o' Clubs.

"Ah!" said Farmer Dunn.

"That pore le'l roan pony," continued Jack

o' Clubs ; " 'im what be so shockin' broke at the knee. That le'l ole-fashioned, short-winded pony, I mean."

" Ah ! " said Mr. Dunn.

" That pore le'l ole thing that be so pitiable to look at when 'e goo out wi' the milk-cart," continued Jack o' Clubs.

" That theer twenty-yare-oold pony," explained his brother.

" Ah ! " said Mr. Dunn.

" Well," continued Jack o' Clubs, " we 'ear 'e be for sale. Good girl! Pretty girl. Steady! Whoa! What a nice long 'ead that dog 'ave got, to be sure."

" We lorst our own little pony," stated brother Ben.

" 'Tis such shockin' bad times to be sure, sir," said Jack o' Clubs.

" Oi aren't never knowed trade to be so bad this ten year past."

" Or twanty yeer past," added brother Ben.

" We lost our pore ole father Christmas time," pursued Jack.

" And now we lost the pore le'l pony," sighed his brother.

" And the rent due," said Jack o' Clubs ; " and the income tax gone up. 'Ow be us pore chaps to make a livin' ? "

Farmer Dunn offering no reply to this question, Jack o' Clubs experimented with a new one.

"What be you arstin' for the pore ole pony?" he inquired.

Farmer Dunn said: "Fifteen guineas."

"'Tis light work, ourn," continued Jack o' Clubs, who had apparently not heard the answer to his question. "All we want is some pore le'l broken-down ole thing; some aged pore thing, we want, as be past doin' reg'lar *work*. Any wore-out ole thing 'll do, jes' so's 'e kin draw the cart about from door to door while we tries to sell a le'l ole-fashioned curiosity or two to pay the rent."

"Fifteen guineas," said Mr. Dunn.

"Jokin' apart," rejoined the tally-man, "we bin talkin' things over and we rackon we could get a pound or two together and buy that pore ole pony o' yourn—'tis light work, ourn. If you was to let us 'ave 'im fur a pound or two, we could pay for 'im be March."

"Fifteen guineas—cash down," said Mr. Dunn.

"Fi-pound fifteen, did you say, sir?" demanded Jack o' Clubs.

"Come 'ere, Nell!" said Mr. Dunn.

Jack o' Clubs stepped back. "You are trained the dog to be obedient, I see, sir," he remarked. "Can we 'ave the pony for a day or two on trial, Mr. Dunn?"

The farmer shook his head.

"Can we take the pore, le'l ole thing for a spin along the common there?"

"No," said Farmer Dunn; "nor you can't jest try 'er up the road. I 'eerd about you two from the missis, last night. You come round 'ere with that same ole outfit what you got there now and you tell 'er as I be met with you on me way to market. You tells 'er as I say you can 'ave out the pony to try along the road. Good job for me moi missis be a Yorkshire woman. Y' ugly pair of lyin' rascals, you."

"Now I come to look a le'l closer, sir," said the tally-man quietly, "that certainly be *another* gentleman we met at market, sir. But the likeness be uncommon close, sir. D'ye see the difference now, Ben?"

"Certainly I do," replied Ben.

"When I spoke to the ganelman yisterday, I could 'a swore as that be Mr. Dunn."

"Anybody could 'a took their oath on it," asserted brother Ben.

"Anyone can see *now*, though," continued

Jack o' Clubs, "as the ganelman we spoke to yisterday be a shorter ganelman."

"And stouter," said Ben.

"Nor yet so fresh-complexioned and 'and-some like," added Jack. "Will you call the le'l dog to come back to you, sir?—sich a good-lookin' dog as that be, to be sure."

"We could scrape up ten guineas if the ganelman would give us time," remarked Ben.

"Fifteen guineas," said Mr. Dunn.

"We must 'ave some sort of le'l ole pony—pore as we be," explained Jack. "'Tis no manner o' use for to seek an' foller our trade without you got a pair o' sharves an' some old thing between them. Will you take twelve guineas, Mr. Dunn—'arf down?"

"Fifteen guineas—cash," said Mr. Dunn.

"Ask the ganelman if 'e'll book five guineas fur the time bein'," suggested brother Ben.

"Ah!" murmured Jack o' Clubs.

The farmer stretched his arms, and yawned.

"We should like to try 'im round the common, jest for satisfaction's sake," stated Jack o' Clubs.

"Pay the fifteen guineas and the cob's youn—to-night," said Farmer Dunn. "Then you can try 'im where you like."

“ We got a fancy to try ’im before we buy ’im—jest for satisfaction’s sake. It’s the reg’lar thing, Mr. Dunn.”

“ I got a fancy, jest for satisfaction’s sake,” said Mr. Dunn, “ not to let you do the reg’lar thing. You are done it so reg’lar, folks ’ave learned to be careful.”

Jack o’ Clubs sighed loudly.

“ ’Tis ’ard lines,” said his brother, “ when we ’appen to are got the cart and ’arness so ’andy and convenient.”

“ And the rent due,” added Jack o’ Clubs ; “ and pore father dead. ’Tis cruel ’ard to make a livin’. Could we try the pore ole pony to-night, sir ? ”

“ Yes,” said the farmer. “ Fifteen guineas.”

Jack looked at Ben. Ben looked at Jack.

“ Well, we’ll ’ave to pay,” said Jack.

“ Yes,” echoed Ben, with gloom, “ we’ll ’ave to pay.”

The farmer, calling Nell to heel, walked to the stable door.

Jack o’ Clubs, opening his greasy waistcoat, brought forth a bag of sovereigns.

“ Dear ! Dear ! ” sighed Jack o’ Clubs.

XXVII

A FRUSTRATED ELOPEMENT

I HAD come up from my little bolt-hole in Buckinghamshire, and I had dined unsatisfactorily in Fleet Street. The London fairways, which were full of mud and motor-omnibuses and pink newspapers, disgusted me. The chattering, breastless women and their stupid men disgusted me. I thought I would crawl back to my lodging and spend the otherwise profitless hours in consultation with the late Mr. William Cowper. I had him securely locked up in my bag.

But as I crossed a narrow street which connected one stream of motor-'buses with another stream of motor-'buses I was stopped by a young and brightly decorated woman, who took my arm and said :

“ Good evenin', duckie ! ”

You can imagine what sort of woman this was. I pushed her roughly from me, and a moment afterwards was sorry, for the little pig-like, stupid eyes, beneath their plastered lids, looked tearful and afraid. Furthermore, I knew that I had seen those eyes before.

Then "Walk with me a step," said the young woman. Her manner was not brazen ; it was a pleading, anxious manner, and she glanced about her with a hunted look.

"Oh, walk with me a step," she said again. "Oh, pray now, walk with me. Oi be fair fritted."

Like a sudden projectile the truth crossed into me. I knew her language. I knew her name. Glancing up the little street, I saw that it was presently occupied by but one other person—an ugly man with pimples, who stood beneath a lamp-post and glowered at us. He didn't seem to matter. I thought to myself, "The coast is clear ; I will risk my reputation with the clergy."

And so I offered the girl my arm ; she took it eagerly. "Let us hotchle up the road," I said.

The girl was too stupid to make any matter of this word, which I had carefully employed. And so I said to her point-blank, "You are a Boverly ?"

"Me mother be a Boverly," she answered quietly. A perception of the importance attaching to this question stole gradually into her dull head. She looked at me wonderingly, with her mouth open, and after some

time she said: "Then be you from the 'Underds?"

"I be," replied your servant.

At which the girl began to cry.

We crossed the road and scaled the steps of an illuminated hostelry. A man was standing at the door, and I was surprised to recognise in him my friend of the pimples—the man who had stood beneath a lamp-post and watched us. The breath of this person offended me, and I moved him to one side. He did not resent this action, but leered at me with an indescribably offensive expression of good-fellowship.

We went into the tawdry common-room of this "hotel," and were conducted to a vacant table, where some purple liquid was presently brought to us.

The girl had been quietly drying her eyes, and when next I glanced at her there were little cakes of flour all round them. She looked absurd.

"Oi be niece to Walter Boverly, what be bailiff at the abbey," she said.

"He's a fine old chap," I exclaimed.

"And do you know Gert and Gert's le'l babby twins?" inquired the girl.

"Rather!" I said.

“ Be they growed ? ”

“ Oh, they be vastly growed,” I said.

“ Fancy, now—the le’l rascal chaps ! ”

“ Me mo’er she married a second,” continued my companion, “ a psalm-singin’ swine out o’ Kent. He druv me to this, the noun.”

“ That’s a lie,” I answered. “ You were stupid and jealous, and walked about the village spreading wicked tales. You left the shop in a temper, and came to London to look for a place. I live near Ambledon (this was her village), and I *know*. Couldn’t you find a place ? ”

By way of answer, the girl began to cry again. So that of necessity I looked the other way, and found myself confronted by the leering gaze of—Pimples. I scowled at the man, and he transferred his scrutiny to my companion. But he did not smile at *her*. She looked up and caught his eye, and her sobs suddenly ceased—stuck in her throat, as it were. She gradually twisted her features into an automatic sort of smile and turned to me with a mirth which was more boisterous than real. “ Wake up, ye arkid fool,” she said ; “ you be so unkid sorrowful ; you be givin’ me the ’ump.”

"Couldn't you find a place?" I said again.

"They twins—be they well favoured?"

"Fair fine," I answered. "Couldn't you find a place?"

She cast a hurried glance in the direction of Pimples. Still maintaining the "gay life" air, she said, in little breathless, painful gasps: "'Twas finding the place as ruined me. 'Twas the woman we call Mar. . . . She met me to the station. . . . Here, in London. . . . She looked so turr'ble genteel. . . . She was for takin' pity on me . . . for findin' me a lodging."

"I shall take you back to Ambledon to-night," I said.

The girl looked sharply at me. "I dursn't. . . . Oi be fritted," she exclaimed. "You can come 'ome 'long o' me."

I told the painted dummy that—I don't know what I told her; but she at last was brought to understand my meaning. And she was, of course, offended.

"Oi ain't wantin' ye're comp'ny," she said. "You be a low-sperited swine. . . . But there'll be a row atome to-night unless—unless.—There! I aren't 'ad *no* luck lately."

"You're having some to-night," I said.

"I'm taking you back to Ambledon to-night. Your Uncle Walter will take care of you."

"Oi dursn't. 'E'll gi' me a 'oiding, Uncle Walt will. And the folk'll talk so and all."

"It can't be worse than this, can it?" I inquired.

"Oi be fritted," said the girl.

"You're coming, anyhow," I insisted.

"Oi be fritted!" she exclaimed again, and again began to cry.

As before, I looked away, and was in time to notice Pimples very deliberately rise from his seat, lurch across the reeking room, and plump himself down at a vacant table, exactly next to ours. And once again my companion, with a gasp, forced back her sobs and turned towards me with pretended mirth. The reflection forced itself upon me that Pimples was not the wholly unimportant animal which I had at first supposed him to be. I examined him steadily, and he returned the look; but this time he did not leer. There was a distinct malevolence in his expression.

Therefore, in a manner sufficiently like that of "the Boys," I turned to the girl and joked with her. It is called "joking."

I also paid a waiter for the beverages which we had not consumed, and raising my voice I

said to the lady : “ *Where* did you say you lived ? ”

She told me the address, and I then said, still talking loud : “ We will get a cab and go there.”

We therefore made our way to the street and called a hansom-cab. I told him to take us to a certain railway-station. And a voice by my side said :

“ Cappie, I forpid it ! Dis man is eloping mit my vife.” And looking round, I met the breath of Pimples.

Then there was a tiresome sort of scuffle. And policemen appeared. And many ruffians. And some more women. And everybody shouted at me. And my late companion took the arm of Pimples. And somebody threw some mud. And there issued from the crowd an old, grey-bearded man, with flaming eyes, who climbed upon the step of the cab and shoved into my hand a small red book, entitled “ *Pleas for Purity.*”

So I ordered the cabman to drive on.

XXVIII

THE BODGER

"WELL, sir," said Mr. Gilks, "you could not rightly call me a plumber, nor you could not rightly call me a carpenter; I 'aven't never been properly apprenticed. I be what they call a Bodger."

"And how would you define this term, Mr. Gilks?" I inquired.

"Sir?" said Mr. Gilks.

"I mean to say, what *is* a Bodger?"

"Sir," responded Mr. Gilks, "if anybody do plumbing, but you cannot rightly call them a plumber; and if anybody do a bit at cabinet-making and joinery, but you cannot really call them a carpenter; and if anybody mend watches or boots, but you cannot rightly call them a watchmaker nor a snob, that be what they call a Bodger, sir!"

"It seems a pity, Mr. Gilks," I suggested, "that, possessing such varied talents, you could not arrange to concentrate them."

"Sir?" said Mr. Gilks.

"I say that you would probably have done

better by sticking to one trade instead of messing about with so many."

"Ah, sir," responded Mr. Gilks, "I have allus bin that weakly. No man can go through a reg'lar apprenticeship when 'is chest be weak the same as mine."

I looked at Mr. Gilks again, and perceived that he certainly did look pale and pinched.

"Not, mind you," continued Mr. Gilks, "but what I arn't got a trade of me own, if it come to that. I be a egg-dealer be trade. What they calls a higgler. But when your chest be weak, the same as mine, you cannot do much at the higglin'. I makes a little sometimes be mendin' water-butts. I got a knack wi' water-butts."

"Ah!" I murmured; "that reminds me. Your present proposal, I understand, is to bodge my water-butt?"

"Yes, sir," assented Mr. Gilks. "To fix your water-butt so's it don't leak."

"No, really!" I exclaimed, being overjoyed at the prospect, for I was tired of plugging up the wretched thing with dusters. "If you can do that, Mr. Gilks, I shall be highly grateful to you, and you may name your own reward."

"Oh," said Mr. Gilks, "I don't trouble narthun about that, sir." If his starved little

face had not belied the thought, you might have supposed him to be some sort of PERSON who mended water-butts for recreation and glory.

“There are one or two other odd jobs about the place which you might attend to if you pull this off all right,” I thoughtfully suggested.

“So I see, sir,” responded Mr. Gilks. “That there lawn-mower what you be usin’ don’t run same as she should do. I mend lawn-mowers.”

“Do you know, Mr. Gilks,” I mildly observed, “she struck me as cutting abnormally well this morning.”

“Don’t you believe it, sir,” said Mr. Gilks. “That machine ’ave got what I call a hiccup. No machine can be working proper when she run with what I call a hiccup. Can I trouble you for a ’ammer, sir?”

I provided Mr. Gilks with the hammer, also, at his further request, with some galvanised wire and a pair of nippers. “Do you propose,” I inquired of Mr. Gilks, “to tie up the leak with wire? Because I don’t think that would work.”

“Jest you leave it to me,” responded Mr. Gilks, as with a cheerful smile he clambered up the side of the water-butt.

I returned to the lawn-mower. I had

pushed her once up and was turning to come down again when my progress was suddenly arrested by the sound of a tremendous, unparalleled bang! Mr. Gilks had burst the water-butt.

Having gaffed the little gentleman and disentangled him from a complicated environment of galvanised wire, iron hooping, and wooden staves, I was at leisure to observe that he had damaged his forehead. By the application of liniment, cotton-wool, and whisky with soda, we were able to defeat the probability of fatal results from this wound. The Bodger then proclaimed his intention of dealing with the lawn-mower.

I endeavoured to dissuade Mr. Gilks from the prosecution of this enterprise. I represented to him that, weakened as he was from loss of blood and from his recent exertions; shaken in nerve as the result of his late terrible experience, it would be folly to embark at once upon a new adventure; one fraught, perhaps, with even greater dangers. The impulsive soul of Mr. Gilks, however, would brook no counsels of precaution. He flung himself upon the lawn-mower.

I will not trust myself to write at length upon the painful results of this action. It is

a subject upon which I find it difficult to express myself with gentleness. Mr. Gilks entirely destroyed my lawn-mower—my well-beloved. Having minutely dissected it, he bent the blades until they attained a complicated shape of his own invention. He then essayed to reassemble the parts; but after two hours of strenuous labour he had produced a chaotic—nothing; a hopeless conglomeration of twisted bolts; a concatenation of spikes and spirals which I have since sold to the butcher for making sausages. He also amputated a portion of his right thumb. I deliberately cursed him and he went away.

That night I did not sleep. Fear, as professional writers express it, gripped me by the throat. I had suddenly remembered the existence of an "Employers' Liability Act." What if Mr. Gilks should develop lock-jaw and die? Should I be expected—nay, legally compelled—to support for ever afterwards his wife and seven children? I am not a lawyer and I did not know. It was, I thought, a heavy price to pay for one day's mild amusement. I wondered whether it was too late to protect myself against the persecutions of Mr. Gilks by insurance, and whether, in so doing, I should be committing Arson—or is it

Simony ? I was not a lawyer and I did not know.

At last the grey dawn broke. Wild and haggard, I—I lay on my back and watched the ceiling. Suddenly my anxious ear detected a fearful, ominous sound—a click of the gate-latch. Sick, but quite calm, I bounced out of bed and flung myself into the garden, ready—even eager—to meet our village constable. All that I did meet, however, was Mr. Gilks.

You cannot imagine with what joy I saw his weazened face. If I could purr I would have purred over him ; if I had possessed another lawn-mower I would gladly have lent it him to play with. I *was* so glad to see him.

He had come, the simple fellow, to remind me that I had not paid him for his labours of the preceding day. And to suggest, with delicacy, that an offering in compensation for the injuries which he had obtained in my service would be accepted cheerfully.

When we had settled these matters to the satisfaction of Mr. Gilks, that talented mechanic proceeded to ask for further employment. I pointed out that such small contracts as I had to offer did not seem

to bring him any luck. Mr. Gilks admitted the truth of this proposition. He attributed it to my place of residence. "I 'ave knowed this le'l old cottage since I be *that* 'igh," said Mr. Gilks, "and it always 'ave been looked on as unlucky." The Bodger then explained that he had raised the question not with any hope, or even wish, that I would offer him direct employment, but with the object of inciting me to recommend him to my friends.

This suggestion pleased me. I inquired of Mr. Gilks if he happened to be acquainted with a gentleman named Cobb, who occupied a new and offensive bungalow at Sly Corner. "Know the gentleman well, I do," said Mr. Gilks.

"That being so," I observed, "it will perhaps be worth your while to call on Mr. Cobb, accompanied by this note." The Bodger thanked me, pocketed the note, and departed.

This was the note :—

"DEAR COBB,—Do you ever intend to return that pair of shears which you borrowed? Your failure, in the face of repeated applications, to send them back has caused me great inconvenience. The man, S. Gilks, who brings the note, is an all-round

mechanic of exceptional ability—just the sort of person you are wanting. He specialises in hydraulic appliances and lawnmowers. I really must insist on your returning the shears at once.”

Cobb, as I had hoped, came round to see me that evening in a condition of speechless rage. “Here are your beastly shears,” he said. “Perhaps it may surprise you to hear that the exceptional mechanic whom you sent me round has drowned himself in the cistern.”

“It doesn’t surprise me,” I said, adding, after a pause, “because your bungalow is known to be unlucky. Where have you hidden the corpse?”

“Luckily for Gilks, we found his corpse in time to resuscitate it; artificial respiration, you know. Goodness knows what the fool will cost me. He’s ruined the cistern; I shall *have* to buy a new one; and there’s the doctor to pay as well. I wish I’d let the beggar drown.”

“Dr. Williams, wasn’t it?” I inquired politely; “he’s expensive.”

“Nonsense,” said Cobb, who likes to argue, even on his calm days; “the doctor wasn’t there ten minutes.”

“ I am afraid, Cobb,” I replied, “ that the latest bulletin has not yet reached you. Doctor Williams visited poor Gilks again to-night and tried to take his temperature. He has not yet recovered his thermometer and there is talk of an operation.”

XXIX

CONCERNING ELLEN MAY

THE hobgoblin season has now set in ; and I was not surprised, at the turn of the days, to find one dusking in my lane.

This was a girl hobgoblin ; rising seven and six hands high. I knew her for a goblin by her cap, which was of crimson worsted, roughly knit. She wore very few clothes, and those which did encompass her were torn, grotesquely fashioned, and quite filthy. She hopped along in front of me, carrying a goblin milk-can, and often stopping to steal a sip from it.

I hurried up the road and came abreast of her. Hobgoblins require to be wooed with boldness. So I took this little lady's hand and lifted up her chin. She was coloured like the autumn heath, all bronze and brown, with eyes like big ripe blackberries. " And who are you ? " I said.

" Ellen May Brett," replied the goblin promptly.

I asked her where she lived, and she nodded

her head in the direction of Sly Corner, saying, "In the cottages."

I reflected, with some pity for Ellen, that this nod and those words pointed to Sly Cottages. Sly Cottages are quite the most delightful things in our landscape ; but they are held in disrepute by the peasantry, being situated on a kind of marsh, and being low-pitched, partly roofless, and wholly doorless. The æsthetic and commercial prejudices of a Hallowed Past are responsible for the stunted dimensions of these dwelling-places, and the Finger of Time is responsible for the irregularity of their tiling. But man, and man alone, is to be blamed for the absence of doors, the tenants themselves having tugged and battered down those common decencies for the purpose of making fires with which to warm their hides.

Sly Cottages, therefore, are always inhabited by "undesirables" : unless you count out Mr. Webster, who is a decent sort of man at heart, but who has "caught the asthma in his throat," and has therefore descended to this. Mr. Webster will soon be in the workhouse. All the people who live in Sly Cottages will soon be in the workhouse : these residences being, as it were, a species

of quaint and old-world booking-office to the workhouse. Nobody goes to live in Sly Cottages unless he drinks and thieves and has lost all shame. And nobody, be it therefore said (to the glory of God), has ever been known to pay any rent for a Sly Cottage—excepting, of course, Mr. Webster. You can see him any evening as you pass (the road is passable in July and August), and you can hear *them*. They sing and swear and scream and club each other. Mr. Webster sits mending their boots, for which they seldom pay him.

You can imagine, therefore, with what sort of interest I learned where my goblin came from. “And you have been fetching the milk for mummy, like a good little girl?” I hazarded.

Ellen May Brett rather solemnly shook her head. “Mo’er be gone áway,” she explained. “Me dad, he frowed a lamp at mo’er, and mo’er be gone away. ’Tis me auntie what lives atome along o’ dad and me ; me aunty what come out o’ th’ Union. Me auntie, she ’ave got a le’l babby in th’ Union. Mo’er, she ’itted auntie when auntie come out o’ th’ Union.

“When I git ’ome,” continued Ellen,

"auntie's gointer gimme a (foul word) hidin'."

I jumped so sharply that I think my little goblin was startled. She seemed to be even more surprised by my next question. "Why do you speak such nasty, bad words?" I said.

Ellen May Brett regarded me with wonder. "'Tis what me auntie told me," she replied.

"Why are you going to get a hidin'?" I asked.

"'Cos the milk be nearly gone," responded Ellen, lifting the lid of her can and exposing a bare cupful of liquid. Auntie she told me I was not to spill none; and I spilled it nearly all."

"Are you sure you spilled it, Ellen? I think you drank a lot."

"No," said Ellen, "I spilled it."

"But I *saw* you drink some."

"I spilled it," repeated Ellen, drawing away from me.

"Then," I responded, "it must have been some other little girl I saw with her nose in the can."

"Yes," assented Ellen gravely; "you see some other le'l gairl. . . . When I be growed I shall gi' my auntie a (bad word) hidin'. . . . I shall frow a lamp at *her*."

By this time we were come to Ellen's stile ; and the marsh and Sly Cottages were close at hand. I presented Ellen with my blessing, a kiss, and three halfpence. She did not stop to thank me, being eager for the stile, which she climbed laboriously, rung by-rung, making a great clatter with the milk-can. She came down with a plomp on the other side, and hobbled off into the dingy twilight, saying loudly :

" *Blarst* the mud ! "

.

Making diligent inquiry, I have learned some facts concerning Ellen May Brett, but they are not to her advantage. She is a bad little girl, it seems. She comes late to school ; she steals food from the other children ; she utters a constant and varied flow of beastly adjectives. She is, in the memorable phrase of our schoolmaster, a " damnable, infectious child."

But I have reformed this hobgoblin. Oh yes, I have reformed her. I am exercising an influence over her. When we met for the second time, she was arguing with a small boy in a ditch. He was bleeding from several places, and she had nearly strangled him.

“ This little substantive,” my Ellen exclaimed, “ he have called me a —— never mind. *I* shall teach him to call me a —— never mind.”

I exercised my influence, and Ellen May let go. We then held hands and strolled away, discoursing of the proprieties ; of Schoolmasters ; of God ; of Punishment ; of Virtue, Happiness, and Reward. This conversation, accompanied, as it was, by a further offering of halfpence, produced a great impression upon Ellen May. She showed henceforward much fondness for me ; she has become a constant and familiar companion. No matter which road I may choose to take of an evening, it is sure to lead me to Ellen May, who will leave off playing with, or hitting her companions, and trot towards me, crying triumphantly :

“ That be my funny man.”

And now she goeth regularly to school and gets there earlier than any other child. Her language is chaste. Her demeanour modest. She accepts correction meekly.

You can see, therefore, that my boast of reform is not a vain one ; though yesterday—well, yesterday I called on Mr. Pinkhurst, the village Whiteley, and Ellen May, who had shadowed me as usual, squatted on the door-

step and watched me haggle. I said to Mr. Pinkhurst : " Sir, this is preposterous. You can keep your egg-cups. I cannot afford to pay you threepence for a penny egg-cup."

And I went away.

But as I nursed my bitter thoughts in Poundings Wood there was a rustling among the bracken, and two egg-cups, accompanied by Ellen May, came out of it.

A hot and sticky hand was thrust in mine, and a breathless voice said cheerfully :

" He be a swine, that Pinkhurst. Here be the egg-cups. I took and pinched 'em."

XXX

LAMB-STROKE

WHEN, this morning, I came upon Benny Domer in a place of concealment behind a hayrick, and that sadly disreputable young gentleman pretended not to see me, I perceived that Providence had singled me out for the duty of offering Benjamin some Christian guidance.

I said to him :

“ Benjamin, what are you doing here ? Wherefore are you hiding ? Why aren’t you at church ? Don’t you know what happens to idle folk ? ”

“ Beggin’ yeure pardon, sir,” responded Benjamin, rubbing his trousers with a bashful hand, “ but—but oi be courtin’, sir ! ”

Save for an occasional cobnut and a great deal of abuse bestowed upon Joanna, I do not think that Benjamin had acknowledged the existence of an opposite sex during his whole life. And Joanna really did not count. For one thing, she was Benny’s cousin, and lived next door to him, and Benny loathed the sight of her. For another, she was homely

beyond the aid of art or flattery, having freckles, and a squab nose, and a mouth that was made for eating bacon dumpling. Also she sang hymns, and believed in devils, and knitted—knitted always. Joanna, in fact, was just that sort of dull, good, ill-favoured, righteous woman whom Providence has created with the apparent object of causing mankind to love the wicked ones. And in Benny's case she had apparently fulfilled her destiny. I wondered to myself what loose-tongued little chit of the villages had captured Benny's fancy.

"It is Fanny Duke, I suppose," said I.

"Aht it ben't!" asserted Benny, with quite a suggestion of scorn in his tone.

"That yellow-haired, calf-eyed girl, then—Clara Whitestone."

"Not me," said Mr. Domer definitely.

"H'm! Well, then, let me see—it will be Perseverance: Perseverance Gandy. She has a baby, so that the home will be complete from its start."

"Goo 'lung with ye!" answered Mr. Domer. "No Perseverances for *me*."

"Then," quoth I, "you've stumped me. I give it up. Who is the lady that you love?"

"Eh?" queried Benjamin.

“What is the name of the girl with whom you’ve fallen in love?”

“*Me!*” echoed Benny. “Moi gracious, then! Oh, pray, now! *Me* in love! Beggin’ yeure pardon, mester, but oi ben’t fell in love with no one.”

“But you told me you were courtin’?”

“True enough. So oi be!”

“But in that case you must—you can’t—don’t tell me you are courting a lady whom you do not love?”

“*Love!*” echoed Benjamin. “Oi don’t love no one—not to say *love*; nor never will, please Gahd! Love, indeed!”

“What makes you go courting, then?”

“Beggin’ yeure pardon, sir,” Mr. Domer explained, “oi be lamb-struck, as the sayin’ go.”

“And what,” I demanded, “what on earth may that be?”

“Lamb-struck?” queried Mr. Domer. “Why, aht be—aht be—lamb-struck! Just thaht: lamb-struck!”

“But what does it feel like, Benny?”

Benjamin inspected the heavens once more, and his toes, and the pastureland around him. And he performed fresh feats of a contortional character. And again he blushed.

"Maybe," said Benjamin, "as oi'd best tal yew th' 'istory o' moi lamb-stroke, what come on me sudden, a month ago next Thursday, as was all brought to pass 'lung of me eatin' dumpling on a empty stomick. It's a short 'istory."

"Do let me hear it," I pleaded.

"They dumpling," reflected Mr. Domer, "be more fidgetin' to a man's mind nor arl the strong licker as ever was brewed. It was dumpling an' nowt else, as brought about my lamb-stroke. 'Cos dumpling was the on'y thing what oi'd partook of.

"An' there was oi a-walkin' be a farmhouse, thinkin' nowt of nothink—leastways, nowt of courtship. P'r'aps oi woun't goo so fur as to say oi thowt of nothink, 'cos p'r'aps aht theer would be a loi. 'Cos I *did* think to notice the loi of some coverts what oi see. An' oi noticed, loikewise, as the sun be shoinin', an' the greenstuff sproutin' foine, an' the bluebells an' that a-showin' up. An' oi seed a pond o' frog-bit, what showed loike silver in the sun-glare. An' oi 'eared a throstle and a pewee. An' then, begard, aht dam thing come upon me, an' theer was oi, fair lamb-struck, a-takin' notice of a female as was weavin' blooms an' thaht along be

the brooksoide. Oi noticed 'er of a sudden, loike, an', as oi seed 'er, the dahm thing come upon me, an' theer was oi, fair lamb-struck !

" An' thaht theer maid looked sloi at me. An' begard, thaht finished it.

" Oi be thaht lamb-struck, oi couldn't wait for no reflections, but up to 'er oi otchles. An' the nearer oi goos, the sloier she looks. An' then oi otchles faster.

" An' when oi gits 'lungsoide of 'er, sloi menk as she was, 'er face was 'id from me. An', begard, oi kissed 'er—bein' lamb-struck ! I kissed 'er 'and, begard ! And 'er elber. And oi kissed the back of 'er neck, wheer there be a dimple and a curl, what lay together same's ef they was fitted theer. And she turned 'er 'ead, an' then, begard, I kissed 'er on the mouth.

" I looked at 'er face, then, mester, and then oi see—oi see—what do you think oi see ? Oh, pray, and oh, dear, oi see as this young maid what oi'd been kissin' (me bein' lamb-struck), oi see as it be—*our Joanna !*

" Lairrf ? Begard, I didn't 'airrf lairrf ! Our Joanna ! Oh, pray !

" ' Oold up, oold gel,' says oi. ' Oi kissed ye once through bein' lamb-struck ; and now,

begard, oi'll kiss ye for yeself.' And, begard, oi done it, too ! ”

Mr. Domer ceased his narrative at this point in order to rise up and gesticulate wildly in the direction of a proximitous stile. “ An' there she be, th' oold devil,” said Benjamin.

“ And you do not love her ? ”

“ Love her ? *Love* her ? Begard, no ! Oi be just lamb-struck.”

“ Certainly,” quoth your servant, speaking half to himself, “ certainly th' oold devil is not handsome.”

Then spoke Mr. Domer—not at all to himself :

“ You squab-nosed little toad,” he said, “ oi'll mek yew eat 'er muddy boots for thaht ! ”

XXXI

THE LITTLE RED MAN

THERE was a grand, harmonic stillness upon the Old Town : an August stillness, draped with the pompous gold and heavy purples of an evening sun ; fragrant with the breath of drowsy honeysuckle.

I remember thinking, as I looked down upon this little red-brown hive, and saw the sun-elves dancing in a hundred latticed panes, that here that fabulous old stork, who brings good gifts to babies as they lie at breast, must have his dwelling. But I looked for him in vain.

The smoke curled up, and the smoke-stacks swaggered and jostled each other, and the honeysuckle nodded in its sleep, and the earth was clothed in sunlight as with an amber robe. But that bald-headed old stork could not be tempted forth to view it all. Unless—unless . . . The Old Town lieth snug within a valley, as it is meet and goodly that a ripe old town should do, and so behind those roystering chimney-pots the sloping pastures rise and

brush the sunbeams with their crest of elm and oak and fir. And there, above the topmost thicket—which they call the Rectory Wood—I seemed to see . . . ?

At any rate, I could not be certain about this bird. He was, at best, but a white speck amid the amber ; and such white specks are varied and elusive in their form. But when I took my eye from the fir tops, and allowed it to rest upon the Rectory Meadow—which sweeps like a great god's mantle from the fir tops to the town—I saw the myriad little red men, whom I always see when I survey this view. They clamber out of the Old Town's churchyard in battalions, thick as ants. They are dressed in red from cap to toe ; the greatest of them is no greater than a crow in stature. They carry long white staves, and they dance and leap upon the sward, and hulloo to the echoes, and they race each other to the fir trees.

This evening there were thousands of them, and they were very gay. They played at hide-and-seek among the clover heads, and stood upon each other's shoulders to view the thistle tops. Or they lay upon their sides and rolled competitively down the slopes. And they hulloosed, and pranced, and flour-

ished their staves, and the leader of them came to within a yard of the fir woods, when—puff! They were gone—vanished as completely as my friend the stork!

And it was no wonder. For the Hosken family had emerged in procession from the Rectory Woods, singing of prophetic hymns, and clothed on with a festival garb of black.

Whenever the Hoskens walk abroad, these little red men always fade away.

The Hoskens came down the opposite hill-side in a sort of procession, to the number of five. Brother Isaac Hosken—who in his secular capacity supplies your servant with very indifferent coal—led the van, walking backwards. He was encouraging the vocal efforts of his brethren with both arms. The flock, on this occasion, consisted of Mrs. Brother Hosken and Miss Hannah Hosken, together with Miss Hannah's "young gentleman" and Master Job Hosken. Master Job's worldly energies (when not occupied with a catapult) are also directed to the coal trade; and, in spite of the disfiguring effect of that occupation, this youth may always be recognised at a great distance by reason of his trousers, which are of the same abnormal

width all over, being cultivated, as it were, from the parent stock.

Since the red men had vanished and the Hoskens had appeared, there was obviously no comfort to be gained by tarrying upon the hill-side. So I walked down into the Old Town itself. The sun still poured its amber flood upon the window-panes ; tall and splendid hollyhocks were blooming along the cottage walls ; the cottage doors were open, and the women sat beside them, making lace or suckling their babies. And older babies squatted in the doorways, or peered across those funny little pocket-gates which they use in the Old Town to keep their children from the perils of the silent roadway. But it was no longer a silent street. Whilst I had been walking down from *my* hill the Hoskens had been coming down from theirs. I could hear their boots upon the cobble-stones and their devotional voices lifted up in song—though scarcely achieving it. The combined effect of boot and melody—they were, with manifest effort, suppressing the high notes whilst actually upon the High Street—was disjointed and ugly.

There are only three streets in the Old Town ; and two of those are really one.

The Hosken family passed me at a corner, and went on steadily towards the broad end of High Street, where the very old folk live. The cottages are tiny there ; but they have gardens back and front, and it is generally recognised that the possession of these arbours is a guerdon of age and wisdom. I followed the Hosken family with a resentful eye ; and Mr. Dillnutt, our harness-maker, who noted my gaze, spat upon the ground in a manner which was designed to signify his atonement with my thoughts.

“ Et is Grarrnfer Harsken they be airfter,” Mr. Dillnutt explained. “ Grarrnfer Harsken’s bairthday—he’ll be foive-an’-sexty to-day. *Tham’s* ’is lettle bairthday prasant. Gooi’n er gev ’im a spall o’ Sreptur an’ a blassin’ an’ a sloice o’ the fambly moind. There’s allus a dapitation waits on ’im a bairthdays to rub et en about the missus, an’ livin’ in sin, an’ soo fowerth. Oid watch *moi* son come prichin’ ’Ull Foir to me—pray, *that* oi would. Man o’ ’es age to be larned vartue be a passal o’ damned coal-pinchers uv un’s own breedin’. Moi Gard, *oi’d* watch et ! Theer’s un’s woife, too—what we *call* un’s woife ; an’ ain’t she as *good* as un’s woife, wi’ twunty-eight yeers’ sarvice an’ all ?—theer’s ’ur, oi say ? What

soort of a bairthday treat es thes all, oi'd airsk yew? . . . Grarrnfer Harsken's bairthday! Moi Gard, oi wesh un joy uv et!"

And so did I, knowing, as I did, the circumstances of Granfer Hosken's household. For the lady who shared his home with Granfer Hosken—who had shared it for eight-and-twenty years—enjoyed that privilege upon a footing which formed the subject of painful reflection to the righteous. She was, in fact, unwedded to Granfer. And for no reason save that of Granfer's obstinacy.

Granfer's first wife—the mother of Brother Hosken—was a drunkard, a spendthrift, and a slattern. Granfer walloped her with his belt on Saturday nights, and the parson prayed for her on Sunday. But she got "the horrors," and died. And Granfer, a sisterless man, was left with three little children, who required to be fed, and washed, and watched, and mended precisely during those hours when Granfer was occupied at the brewery. And Granfer made a vow.

"Oi'll get a mother for 'em," said he; "but, begard, oi'll never marry 'un. Oi'll boind meself to no damned wummun on this airth. Oi've lost the appetite. Oi'll do as me betters do, begard—oi'll kip a mistress!"

And so a certain woman of middle age, whose name was Anna Bovey, having recently buried an imbecile brother, and having, therefore, a sort of knack at working and thinking for the helpless, was shortly imported into Granfer's household. No one knew exactly by what magic Granfer had triumphed in his somewhat unconventional courtship ; but everybody felt certain that some sort of magic had been employed. For Anna Bovey was reputed to be a lady of Christian principle. Everybody overlooked, I suppose, the magic of a woman's heart in an empty world : the magic of three little children, whose stockings cried aloud for the darning-needle, and whose necks required washing. And it is needless to add that everybody also overlooked the magic in Granfer's eye.

At any rate, the conquest was a settled fact. Anna Bovey entered Granfer's household, and washed the children, and cooked the dinners, and cleaned the cottage, and mended Granfer's clothes. And when Granfer fell ill, she nursed him ; and when the children fell ill, she nursed them ; and when they were all ill together, she went out weeding in the fields or charring at " The Hall," with all the coolness and effrontery of a respectable

married woman. She went to church, too, and instructed her children in the Gospels—those very Gospels which in these days Brother Hosken expounds with such eloquence at the old Police Station on Sundays. And so time went by ; and the children grew up, and Granfer grew grey—Anna Bovey with him. And presently they were left alone in life, and moved their furniture to a cottage in the old folks' quarter, where there are flower gardens. And Anna Bovey continued to wash and mend and save for Granfer, as heretofore, and to go out into the fields when necessary.

And so she grew to be old and (in a manner of speaking) decent. The Old Town forgot about her past—the older women *forgave* it her—and they called her “Mrs. Hosken,” and she called herself by that name, and mixed and spoke with her equals, and knew not shame. Sometimes, when *very* Christian people addressed her pointedly as “Miss Bovey,” she would be seen to flush and bite her lip. But, on the whole, it seemed as if the sense of sin sat lightly on her. She was a happy-looking woman.

And now, in accordance with precedent, the son and grandchildren of Granfer Hosken

were visiting him upon the anniversary of his birth, to urge upon him the justice and expediency of transforming Miss Bovey into an honest woman.

When the procession arrived at Granfer's cottage, they found him seated, as might have been expected, upon a chair, beside his sunflowers. In Granfer's part of the world you are a sadly unfashionable old man if you don't fancy sunflowers. And not to seat yourself conspicuously beside them is to challenge the neglect of the wayfarer.

Granfer's weather-stained countenance had taken on a singular vermilion hue in that amber-coloured light. His stiff grey hair and his stiff grey chin-beard and whiskers formed a sort of circle, the effect of which was to make one think of the tickets which they put in picture-dealers' windows marked "This style, ready framed." Those of Granfer's features which could be distinguished from warts suggested humour and honesty and the sublimest sort of stubbornness. He was smoking a short clay pipe and fondling a teacup. He appeared to be expecting an unpleasant visitor. Brother Hosken's deputation was, in fact, the unpleasant visitor which he expected.

“ So,” said Granfer, with a grave and undemonstrative wag of the head, “ yeu’re come as usual. Befower yew begin to gratalate me, oi’ll be geven yew a word o’ warnin’. It is this : ‘ Be damned to ye’re psalm-singin’. Oi wown’t ’ave none on it ! ’ ”

“ What saith,” responded Brother Hosken, with a kindly smile, as he lifted the latch of the wicket, “ what saith the Good Shepherd ? He saith—er—He saith that even ’im what carries on an’ blasphemes is created in ’Is own image.”

Granfer appeared to derive comfort from this assurance. “ That’s arl roight,” he said. . . . “ What yew brart along to eat ? ”

A black pudding had been brought along, besides two mackerel and a pound of cheese. Also a large china drinking-mug for Granfer, inscribed “ Repent, oh sinner ! ” and a garment of scarlet flannel for Anna.

“ Wheer is Mar ? ” demanded Brother Hosken ; and Granfer replied that she was “ out in the back plot ringin’ in a swarm.”

Some strange bees had taken possession of an empty hive in Anna’s garden that evening, and that lady was, therefore, extremely occupied with a fire-shovel and a key. When

strange bees visit you, these implements must be at once employed for the purpose of ringing them in. If this ceremony be neglected, it is a widely acknowledged fact that all your flowers and vegetables will at once fall victims to the blight, and your pig will die of fever. Also, the roof of your house will be destroyed by lightning, and the well will dry up. Also, a bee which has been well and duly rung is *your* bee, and no man need be listened to who comes blustering round with legends of prior ownership. For all of which reasons Anna Bovey applied herself industriously to the coal-shovel.

And Brother Hosken applied himself to Granfer. He demonstrated the wickedness of that aged person's conduct by means of seven different parables, and he fortified the conclusions to be drawn from them with Scriptural texts of a painfully prophetic character. "And they oony gevs a 'undredth pairt o' the 'orrsors what you will 'ave to go threw in 'Ull," concluded this dutiful son.

Granfer listened very quietly: very patiently. "Oi'm an oold mahn," he said, at the end of it all.

"Thaht yew be, moi lahd!" retorted the son, in a tone of cordial agreement. "An'

glory be to Gard as 'E put grace into yewr 'airt to see et. Oi—— ”

Granfer put up a withered forefinger, and the evangelist ceased talking and fixed an inquiring gaze upon his father. “ When oi tall yew oi'm oold, moi sarn,” observed that gentleman, “ I down't mean to say what yew *think* oi mean. What oi *mean* to say is, oold yewr silly jower, an' give an' oold mahn some peace. Yew leave *moi* sool in *moi* marnagement. Oi'll see as the damned theng down't come to now 'airm.”

“ Yew gut yewr fambly to conseder,” urged the younger man. “ What soort o' gussip is gooin' un alung of yew an' 'er, do yew suppose ? ”

“ Bin gooin' fur a yeer or two be now, oi racken. Oi'll beer op 'ansome for the rest.”

“ *Yew'll* beer op ! ” sneered Brother Hosken. “ Oo's thenkin' o' yew ? A vainglorus oold senner loike what yew be down't matter to no one. Et's the fambly *oi* look at—an' the prenciple—an' 'er. Ain't it oony just an' roight to 'er ? Ain't she bin a rare good wummun to yew ? ”

“ That's what *oi* say,” asserted Mrs. Brother Hosken, speaking for the first time. “ Ain't—— ”

“ ‘Ush, Deborah ! ‘Ush ! ” commanded her husband. “ Don’t excoite your blood-vessels.”

“ Yas,” observed Granfer, ignoring these asides, “ yas, th’ oold un’s bin a arre good wummun to me. An’ I made up me moind to goo barck on the vow, an’ marry ’er ! ”

“ Yew ’ave ! ” exclaimed the Hoskens, in one surprised and joyful voice. “ Yew—— ”

But again the old man’s lifted finger awed them into silence. “ Yas,” he repeated, “ oi med up moi moind to marry ’er. But not for koindness, mark yew, nor yet fur prenciples, nor for no jabbering alleelujee minstrels uv a fambly. Et’s fur peace *oi’m* doin’ et : ’tis rest fur moi power ’ead *oi* be lookin’ fur. An oold marn ain’t gut no roight wi’ vows. What ’e wants is *peace* an’ a rest from ’is stenkin’ fambly. So—— ”

But the rest of Granfer’s candid observations were lost in a hubbub.

“ Granma Harsken ! ” cried her stepson ; “ Granma Harsken ! ” cried the ladies ; whilst Job, the trousered wonder, being sent round to the back plot, returned pulling at an apron, with Granma safely attached to the end of it.

Granma stopped at the rain-tub, a few feet from her visitors, and, transferring her coal-

shovel to the left hand, peered from beneath the other at them through the swiftly dying sunlight.

" 'Ow are yew arl ? " said Granma. " Good an' 'airty ? Brart 'im a puddin', oi see. Thart's good."

" Glory to Gard, Granma Harsken ! " shouted her stepson, much to the lady's surprise. And " Glory to Gard ! " echoed his following.

" We gut a message o' grace for yew, Granma Harsken ! " continued her stepson. " Lesten whoile oi tall yew."

Brother Hosken's " telling " was couched in Scriptural form—a Scriptural form in which the parable predominated.

When he had finished, Granma Hosken looked at him vaguely and shook her head. " Meanin' what ? " she inquired.

" Meanin' as 'e's gointer marry yew ! " explained the stepson.

" Oo is ? " demanded Granma.

" 'Im ! " said Brother Hosken, pointing a finger to Granfer.

" That's roight, oold Anna," corroborated that person. " Oi'm gointer marry yew, oi am—in charch. 'Tis a reward fur yeur good manners."

Granma Hosken stepped forward with wondering eyes, and stood up on a little grass plot full in the light. Long and steadily she gazed upon the company, and with particular steadiness upon Granfer. And then she pointed the coal-shovel towards his chest, and spoke.

“What about that fower shellin’ what you took for the apples on Setterday, Grarrnfer Harsken?” she demanded. “’Ave yew toold yewr children about that? Fower shellin’ apple-money throwed into the beer-can! An’ the table-spread ’e wur bringin’ ’oom for sartin, an’ me as good as chose it! Talk to me about the apple-money, Grarrnfer Harsken—that’s what *yew* got to talk about, ’stead o’ tomfool nonsense about merryin’!

“Merry, indeed! Pray now, oi niver ’eerd the loikes un it! *Me* turn round at moi age and merry ’*im*—’IM THEER—an’ un’s beer-can. Whoi, pray, oi’d be a larrfin’-stuck to arl the town!

“An’ besoides,” added Granma, after a long silence, as she stitched a piece of dusting cloth into the tattered back of one of Granfer’s shirts—and listened for kettle murmurs from within—and flicked a wasp from Granfer’s neck—“besoides,” said Granma, “oi’d wanter

be sure oi loved a mahn afower oi merried
'im !

“ The idea ! ” spluttered Granma, after
another pause. “ *The idea !* ”

And a solitary little red man appeared on
the roof-top, and shook himself with laughter,
as the sun went down.

XXXII

THE CASE OF EMMA WICKS

I WAS riding on the Blowfield Mercury, a pair-horsed conveyance which has been travelling between the railway-station at Mill Gate and the Bell at Blowfield for one hundred and fifty years, and which is still able to cover the distance that separates these landmarks at the mercurial speed of two miles in forty-five minutes. I would not mention the Blowfield Mercury at all except that this express conveyance was the scene of my meeting with Emma Wicks.

The Blowfield Mercury is driven by Amos Pranklin, and conducted by his nephew, a stout young gentleman with a deep complexion, whom the masculine passengers address as "Will" and the ladies as "Dearie."

I had always supposed that William's ample figure and rich colouring arose from his way of living, that they were, in fact, a physical tribute to the generosity of a grateful public. But Amos Pranklin, his uncle, with whom I am fairly intimate, one day

confided in me the painful truth. "'Tis a sad thing, this about young William," he said.

"What thing?" I asked.

"Ain't you 'eard, then?" returned old Amos. "'Tis a public affair in Blowfield, though sad and private in its nature. Young William, 'e 'ave got a strange complaint: 'e 'ave got but one safety-valve to 'is 'eart. The doctors they put that down to a surfeit o' green gooseberries what 'is mo'er she eat. The upshot o' the matter be that young William 'e be liable to go off, off at any minute, same as a biler what's valves be wrong. If you was to talk to William sudden, or to shoot off a gun be'int of 'im, or argue with 'im, or cross 'im, 'e would like as not fall dead in a minute—'im 'avin' but one safety-valve to 'is 'eart, which is liable to blow up with excitement."

This alarming intelligence not only explained poor William's figure and complexion; it also explained the affectionate attitude of his lady passengers, and the consideration and deference which is shown to him even by grown men. "Onderstand my meanin', now," explained his uncle; "there be no fear o' haccidents so long as the lad be handled

gentle ; 'tis on'y a sudden shock as could destroy him. He be otherwise 'ealthy—three-an'-twenty years last birthday, and stood be'ind this 'bus yere for nigh on ten year. Properly 'andled 'e may last a lifetime ; but any sudden shock, that would destroy 'im, 'im 'avin' but one safety-valve to 'is 'eart."

I would not mention William and his sad affliction in this place at all, but for the fact that they exercised an important influence upon my meeting with Emma Wicks.

On the occasion of which I write, I had been fortunate enough, by exercising the virtues of punctuality and prompt endeavour, to secure one of the two coveted places on the Blowfield Mercury's box-seat. Here I was comfortably established when, within a minute of the scheduled starting-time, William appeared and politely requested me to climb down.

" Our vicar," he explained, " is wishful to travel, and he allus 'ave that seat. Plenty o' room inside."

The occupant of the other box-seat was a lady ; I looked at her and perceived that she was looking at William. There was in her eyes an expression of affectionate, maternal sympathy. It suddenly occurred to me that

William was short of a safety-valve. One must not cross him ; if crossed, he would fall down dead. I hastily descended from my lofty perch and made room for the vicar, who rewarded me with a quick nod.

Thus it was that entering the old-world interior of the Blowfield Mercury, I became acquainted with Emma—and not only with Emma, but with mo'er and god-aunt as well.

The latter ladies looked at me sourly when I came in. One of them—who was even more middle-aged and ugly than the other—tugged at her bonnet-strings and spoke.

“ Talk about hovens ! ” she said.

The other middle-aged lady at once addressed herself to the girl at her side. “ D'year that, Emma ? Ye're god-aunt say 'tis close.”

“ Yes, mo'er,” responded Emma.

“ Then open a window, ye dolt,” commanded mo'er.

Emma again said, “ Yes, mo'er,” and did as she was told, with the result that we were immediately visited by the pungent, dust-laden breath of a passing motor-car. The older ladies at once performed a duet of coughing. Emma's mother, sweeping her daughter aside, charged into the window and shut it

again. "Always in sich 'aste, you be," cried Emma's mother. "Couldn't wait a minute, I suppose, till the motor pass? Of course you couldn't. Mercy as god-aunt ain't choke 'erself."

"Better now, dear?" murmured Emma's mother, with tenderness, seating herself by god-aunt's side. God-aunt offered no response. She had fastened her gaze upon Emma—she was regarding that young woman with an air of stern distaste. Mo'er followed her eyes, and a look of displeasure and impatience immediately appeared on mo'er's face. "Emma Wicks," she demanded shrilly, "what be you readin'?"

Emma started and eyed her mother with a guilty blush. "Nothin' much, mo'er," she said; "on'y what the buns was wrapped in."

"Put it away!" commanded mo'er. "You know ye're god-aunt can't abear to see folk readin'."

"I should 'a' thought," observed the lady in question, "'as 'er brother Thomas would 'a' been a warning to her. It be on'y this readin' what sent poor Thomas into gaol."

"That an' mixing them milk accounts," assented mo'er. "But there! 'Tis in the

blood. Their father bean't no better. The way 'e do read an' read! That man, 'e spend a fourpence on the football papers every week of 'is life."

"Huh!" commented god-aunt, "and 'im supposed to be so ill! Whatever be that Emma fiddlin' over now? You wouldn't think a fool like she be could own a sister same as Fanny."

"That you wouldn't," assented mo'er. "There be more sense in Fanny's li'l finger than that girl got in all 'er big, fat 'ead."

"Fanny got a better 'eart, too," asserted god-aunt.

"R!" said mo'er, "and a more nat'ral figger. She be comin' on fine wi' the zither-playin', too!"

God-aunt nodded sagely. "I shall send you some money for more lessons," she said. "Li'l Fanny shall not go in want so long as ever 'er pore old god-mo'er be alive. There's a future in front of Fanny, so soon as she get 'er 'air up."

"Meaning young W.?" suggested mo'er.

"Now then!" commanded god-aunt, erecting a massive forefinger and smiling fatly. "No tales!"

"Bless you," responded mo'er, "I do not

wish to make no tittle-tattle. Though I will say this of Fanny—she be on'y her god-mo'er over again. What? Do you remember that Jevins boy, Nell? And young 'Erbert? And the gentleman what——?”

“Hee, hee! Give over now!” cried god-aunt, once more establishing the forefinger. “Let bygones be bygones, Kate. If Fanny do take after poor ole god-mo'er, the dear li'l thing shan't suffer for it. You shall 'ave the money for them zither lessons, Kate. As for that Emma there, with 'er solemn ways and 'er politeness and 'er independence and what not, why——” A shrug of the shoulder suggested those sentiments which a native delicacy prevented god-aunt from expressing in speech. “Be you decided what to make of 'er?”

“To tell you the truth,” responded mo'er, “I be. I come to a conclusion this very morning, when she spill the teapot over father's 'at—the clumsy howl! That girl be no manner o' good in the 'ouse. No good at all.”

“No good at all,” repeated god-aunt. “Too stupid.”

“An' too wilful,” said mo'er. “She be that clumsy, too. And so quiet. No life in

'er. An' so careless. No more to be depended on than—than that cushion ! ”

“ R ! ” sighed god-aunt.

“ She don't remember 'bove a 'arf o' what you tell her. She don't appear to take no pride in anything. That seem as if the spirit be washed out of 'er. Same as if anybody knocked 'er about.”

“ R ! ” repeated god-aunt.

“ She be that careless, too ! Break nigh everything she touch. And she be that disobedient. A liar also. No use in the 'ouse at all. She can't cook nor she can't sew ; and she be so lazy an' that dirty. No use in the 'ouse at all. And so——”

“ And so ? ” queried god-aunt.

“ And so,” concluded Emma's mo'er, “ I be sending 'er into service.”

XXXIII

EL DORADO

“ Oi wish Oi be in Canada, buildin’ me own constructures ! ” said young Bill Soames.

He was helping Daddy Reach to build up and renovate the old three-step stile at the bottom of Goddard’s Piece. And having marched (in no inconspicuous position, let me say) among the agitational forces which had compelled a supine parish Duma to undertake this public work, I considered it a duty, as well as a pleasure, to superintend it on behalf of the ratepayers. I kept a particularly sharp eye on the parish nail-bag, having heard it whispered that Daddy Reach has openly declared himself to be in favour of Sharing out, Free Love, the Break-up of the Family, and all that sort of thing.

I may say here that this stile is now as firm and comely a stile as any which you may find within five miles of our parish. And one or two of us, if not one only, are entitled to take all the credit for this happy state of things. Until a week or so ago, when one of

us wrote a stinging letter to the Council Clerk, it might safely be said that the stile at the bottom of Goddard's Piece was a disgrace to England. The richest country in the world, if you please, and our stile at Goddard's Piece dead rotten !

But to return to young Bill Soames and Daddy Reach. Seated there as I was, doing my duty by the parish nail-bag, I could not help but listen to their vulgar conversation. When young Soames expressed the wish which I have recorded above, the old man made an ugly face at him, and accompanied that action with a contemptuous gesture, at the same time uttering a noise which was intended to counterfeit the quacking of a duck.

Bill Soames, who was driving home the stout oaken stakes which were to form the mainstay of our new stile at the bottom of Goddard's Piece, arrested his hammer in mid-air.

" Whoi be ye pullin' that ugly fool's face, yoo'd devil ? " demanded young Mr. Soames.

" Whoi be ye talkin' that silly fool's talk ? " responded his foreman.

" Bean't naarthun' foolish in what Oi say," protested Bill. " Oi say as Oi should like to

be in Canada, buildin' me own structures."

"Ought to be in Earlswood, nursin' ye're pore 'ead," grunted Daddy Reach. . . .
"What good be ye goo'ner get out o' Canada?"

Young William, winking loudly, tapped his pocket. "There's farm 'ands in Canada gainin' two-pund ten a week," he remarked. "A bloke could soon be buildin' stiles upon his own land at that rate."

Daddy Reach brought out his little black pipe and filled it slowly (in the parish time). "Buy," he said, after having lighted the pipe to his thorough satisfaction, "you be a silly, half-growed calf, and ye doon't know naarthun'. Oi will tell ye for whoi. Oi be a travelled man meself, as Oi dessay you've a-'eered folk say——"

"Oi've a-'eered *you* say ut," interpolated William.

"That surprise me, too," responded Daddy quietly, "for Oi don't sim to recklect as ever Oi honoured you with me conversation afore to-day. Anyways, ef there's anythin' you 'ear me say, ye may rely upon the truth of it, me not belongun to a chapel-gooun family, same's some folk. And one thing Oi will say

to you now, an' that is this : Let you stay at 'oom, me buy : you got a thick 'ead and a stout 'eart and a narrer belly, same's me ; and all as they there gifts be good for is to do a long day's work and arn a long day's wages. And they wages be the same wherever you be —whether 'tis Canada or New Zealand or California, or the Cape of Good 'Ope. Oi bin to all they places, Oi 'ave, and Oi don't speak naarthun' on'y what Oi *know*."

"Then you forgot a good deal, old man," replied young William scornfully. "For anybody as 'a bin to school will tell ye that the wages be different in all they places, accordin' to 'ow far you be from London. There's men in New Zealand—farm labourers—what earns their three pun ten a week."

"Aye, lad," assented Daddy Reach, "and there's men upon the railway in British Cl'umbia — ordinary plate-layers—what's gainin' their twenty pund a month. That Oi can tell ye from me own knowledge and experience, though Oi bean't never nigh no school—nor chapel neether."

"Then more fool you," returned young William, "for to talk sich nonsense. Bein' as 'ow you know so much, 'ow come ye to tell we as there worn't no difference 'twixt

the furrin' wages and our own? Twenty pund a month is fi' pund a week, same's you would know if ever you 'ad bin to school."

"Twenty pund a month (in British Cl'umbia)," replied old Reach, "is bad food and bad lodgin' and enough bad licker fur to get drunk on of a Saturday night. And two pund ten a week in Canada, that be poorer food and poorer lodgin', and poorer licker still. 'Tis no good for to count a labourin' man's wage in pounds and pence, though that be a favourite error what folk go for to larn in school and chapel."

"School or no school," responded young Bill Soames, "a pund is a pund, and a penny is a penny."

"And a long day's work," said Mr. Reach, "is a long day's work, fit on'y for them as 'as thick heads, strong 'earts, and a narrer belly. And the price of a long day's work is a long day's pay—bad lodgin', bad food, bad licker. They calls it two-and-sixpence 'ere, on Goddard's Piece ; they calls it fifteen bob in British C'lumbia. But 'tis the same thing wherever you be ; and when you be growed old and ye're belly be growed narrer, there's stones to break."

"You got a lot to say," observed young

Bill ; “ I dessay as you *think* you knows. Oi shid like to 'ear the genelman's opinion of ye.”

The gentleman being thus appealed to could say nothing, save that rates were going up, and folk were getting cheeky, and that common workmen ought to know their place and keep it.

XXXIV

HALF-MOURNING

THERE was not the remotest reason in life why Polly Gedge should entertain me to tea and Sussex brown-cake this afternoon. I had only called in for a score of eggs. But she and her speckled hens and her old half-Jersey cow are noted for their cheerfulness and hospitality throughout this country-side.

Besides, Miss Gedge supposed herself to have a reason for offering me this kindness.

“ I got a sister yare,” she said, “ as be come this arternoon from furrin’ parts. I are not sin ’er for fifteen years : and no more changed than they there old bellowses in the chimbley corner, what she taught me the mastery of when I be so ’igh.”

With this preface, and setting at naught my reluctant improvisations, Miss Gedge conducted me into her parlour, where a middle-aged lady was drinking tea. This lady was introduced to me as Mrs. O’Hara.

“ She come from abroad—from Dublin,” said Polly Gedge, in performing the ceremony

of introduction. "She got her own public-house in Dublin, and six villas and a pony-shay. Mr. O'Hara left 'er very well off, though he did drink 'isself to death."

Mrs. O'Hara offered me a bow in harmony with the very stiff silk dress which formed the essential part of her toilet. Then she went on with her tea.

"Don't you mind each other, either of you," said Polly Gedge, in the kindly hope of placing us both at ease. "The young gentleman, 'e look that 'ot, Susan, I felt bound to offer 'im a cup."

Susan performed a reproduction of the bow.

"We needn't take no notice of 'im," continued Polly, "and he needn't take no notice of us. I've obliged the young gentleman with eggs for nearly two yare now, and I'm sure as he be very welcome to 'is cup of tea. Don't be shy of the radishes, sir, and there's another cake in the oven. Make a good tea, sir; we shan't take any notice of you. Me and my sister we are not seen each other for more'n fifteen yare. What was I tellin' you, Susan?"

"About a girl named Maggie, which you say I was acquainted with."

"Certainly you be acquainted with her," insisted Miss Gedge. "'Er an' you was schoolmates."

"The name of Maggie is one I don't call back to mem'ry," responded Mrs. O'Hara.

"Why, you walked out with her cousin."

"Meanin' James?"

"That's right: Jim," assented Polly.

"I remember James all right," admitted the visitor. "What sort to look at was this Maggie?"

"Red 'air and spectacles. Was wicket-keeper at the stool-ball."

"Oh!" said Mrs. O'Hara. "*Oh!* you can't never mean the young woman we user call Carrots?"

"'Tis the same," assented Polly. "'Er what pull you outer the pond when you be so nigh drowned that day ye're comb fall in."

"Yes," mused the lady in silk; "she was a strongly built young woman. What of 'er?"

"'Tis she as kep' 'ouse for the old lady I was tellin' of: 'er old Aunt Ellen, as lived over be Bolding Bottom. You *must* remember Maggie's old Aunt Ellen. Mrs. Sucking as was. She married a schoolmaster for the

second time—a genelman named Pimley ; not over nor above 'andsome 'e was. You *must* remember Maggie's old Aunt Ellen ! ”

Mrs. O'Hara shook her head.

“ A thin old lady, as turned the music for the organ in the chapel.”

“ Ah ! ” cried Mrs. O'Hara, sitting upright with a gesture of enlightenment. “ Old lady with silver candlesticks ? ”

“ That's right,” cried Polly. “ I *knowed* you must remember Maggie's old Aunt Ellen.”

“ And what of 'er ? ” demanded the visitor.

“ Oh,” responded Polly, “ she's dead.”

“ Dear, dear,” murmured Mrs. O'Hara. “ Does anybody ever 'ear anything of that wild young nephew she so valued ? ”

This time Polly looked bewildered. “ I don't seem to rek'lect,” she said, “ as ever Maggie's old Aunt Ellen 'ad a nephew. There was a *brother*. 'E 'ad the farm at Blowfield.”

“ Hi am talking of the nephew,” said Mrs. O'Hara stiffly.

“ 'Tis the brother you mean,” insisted Polly. “ Stout party with a red face.”

“ Hi—am—talking—of—the—nephew,” repeated Mrs. O'Hara, with a determined air.

“ Maggie's old Aunt Ellen, she was one of two : she on'y 'ad the one brother—'im at

Blowfield. There was never a nephew between them. Maggie's mother, she 'ad a nephew. A reckless young fellow what went to prison for writing 'is name on a pension paper."

"There you are!" cried Mrs. O'Hara triumphantly. "That's just the one I mean. I *told* you there was a nephew."

"Yes," assented Polly; "Maggie's mother's nephew. Dark-'aired fellow, gettin' on for forty, though 'e looked younger. Useder walk out with a cook at the 'All."

Mrs. O'Hara nodded. "Played the concertina," she added.

"Joined the Yeomanry, too, for a bit," supplemented Polly.

"'E was groom for a while at Doctor Simpson's, if I remember rightly," suggested the visitor.

"He done a bit at everythink," responded Polly. "His sister married the 'arness-maker at Barnfield."

"Tall girl with a short leg?"

"That's right."

"Name of Looper, same as his. 'Arry Looper: that was his name. Well?"

"Oh, 'e's dead," responded Polly.

"And the sister?"

"Oh, *she* be married to the 'arness-maker

at Barnfield. She don't keep cottage comp'ny no more."

"And the pore old aunt?"

"Maggie's mother, you mean," suggested Polly.

"So *you* say," suggested Mrs. O'Hara.

"She's dead, too," said Polly. "'Tis 'er you mean, for certain. Maggie's old Aunt Ellen, she never 'ad no nephew, only the one old brother up at Blowfield. You *must* remember Maggie's uncle up at Blowfield."

"No," said the visitor.

"'Im what so 'ated the Gyppos!" continued Polly. "'Im what *shot* the Gyppo?"

"No," repeated the visitor.

"'Ad 'is thumb shot off in a quarrel," added Polly, filling in the outline with hopeful zeal.

"I do not rekerlect the man," asserted Mrs. O'Hara. "Seems to have been always shooting."

"Yes," assented Polly. "It was in his nature. You *must* remember Maggie's uncle, Susan. He's give you many a apple."

"I tell you," cried Susan, with a dangerous calm, "that I do *not* remember 'im!"

"Ah well," reflected Polly, "he's dead, at all events."

XXXV

AUNTIE'S HUSBAND

SHE wanted to buy my trousers, and I did not want to sell my trousers.

She was a pertinacious old woman with brown skin and jaggy teeth. She wore earrings and bangles in great number, and an orange-coloured scarf, variously spotted. Her hair was silver-roan. She said she was my aunt.

"Take your foot away from my door and move on," I said. "I have a use for my trousers."

"Now, don't ya make fun o' ye're aunt, young man," replied this blood relation. "Don't you come no 'ank wiv Auntie. Fetch out ye're duds, my lad, an' let yere Auntie run the rule over 'em. My name ain't Auntie Free for nothink. There ain't another lady on the road as kin touch my prices be two shillin' in the pound. Fetch out the trucks!"

"You can't have my trousers," I expostulated. "To-morrow is market day."

"Good chanst to get yesilf a decent out-

fit," responded Auntie. "Ain't you got on'y the one pair?"

I stared at Auntie's ear-rings in dignified silence.

"Because," pursued that voluble lady, "you better come and 'ave a look in my barrer. Git a stick and turn 'em all over. There's a pair in my barrer as was made for Lord George Sanger."

"If you would move your foot I could shut this door," I said.

"If you would fetch out the kickses I could git along," responded Auntie.

"In plain English, madam," I exclaimed, "I'll be damned if I sell you my trousers."

"In plain English, sonny," said my Aunt, "keep ye're 'air on. Can ye give me a drink o' water?"

"It is a pity," continued Auntie, sipping at her glass with an air of the most elegant breeding, "that if you won't sell me ye're old ones, I can't persuade ya to go in for some new ones—as good as new, that is to say. I call ya a cross-grained young feller in the matter o' trousers. If people won't sell they *do* gen'ly buy. Can't I get ya to look at a very 'andsome pair o' ridin'-breeks? I bought 'em, reely, for my little 'usband.

They are doe-skin, and was made for a country squire. Fit to go steeple-chasin' in. I bought 'em, reely, for my little sweet'eart."

"Is he a steeple-chaser?"

"'Oo a steeple-chaser?"

"Your little—er—husband."

"Cert'nly not," responded Auntie. "'E's a *gentleman*. Before I 'ad 'im, 'e drove a milk-van. I soon fetched 'im out o' *that*. Such a well-made little man. 'E was wasted in a milk-van."

"Does he also deal in—ah—sartorial antiques——"

"D'ye mean the clobber line?" asked Auntie.

I nodded.

"My God, no!" cried Auntie. "I tell ya 'e's a gentleman. I don't allow 'im to do nothin' on'y go to 'is slate club an' make up my bank-book. It would break 'is ole wife's 'eart to see 'im mixed up along of the rough blokes what follow *this* trade. The milk-van was bad enough, but *this* business—oh, my God! 'E got curly black 'air and white teeth and a *dandy* waist. 'E's all right, I kin tell ya—my little 'usband."

"Have you had him long, ma'am?" I inquired.

"Five year," answered Auntie. "I've 'ad others, of course ; but none o' them was the equal o' this one. My God—what teeth and 'air ! It would break my 'eart to lose 'im."

I expressed the hope that there was no immediate prospect of Auntie's suffering so tragic a bereavement.

"Well," said Auntie, with some gloom, "'e got none too good a appetite. I think the milk-van weakened 'im. 'E got a delicate constitution. 'Is teeth might be false and 'is 'air a wig to see 'ow beautiful they are. I found 'im a little Noomarket coat this morning. That'll please my little sweet'eart, I lay. 'Elp to keep 'im warm, 'too, poor little bleater.

"If I was to lose '*im*," pursued my Aunt, "what's gointer become o' the little bit o' money I got put by ? There's on'y a lot o' 'ulkin' sons belonging to me, what's all got barrers o' their own be this time. *And wives.*"

I ventured to submit that the sons would, no doubt, succeed in finding useful employment for Auntie's little savings.

"Their wives would," answered Auntie. "Think I worked 'ard all me days, and married a ugly, ill-tempered man like their

father was, to leave me money to a pack o' greedy women? Not me. Let them work for their money, same as I've done. All I got is going to my little sweet'eart—if on'y 'is delicate 'ealth don't master 'im. 'Is 'air and teeth are a picture."

"Does he smoke or drink?" I inquired—feeling that some sort of intelligent inquiry was due.

"The *best*," answered Auntie, with emphasis.

"Yere Aunt don't stint 'im anything. But then ya oughter *see* the little nib. My God, 'e's a beauty! Fancy puttin' 'air an' teeth like them in a milk-van!"

"Of one thing I am certain," cried your servant, according a graceful bow—"he has secured a most kind and affectionate wife."

"Well," said Auntie, with a sort of blush, "I believe in actin' decent be a man. You can't 'ope to take all an' give nothink in this world, can you?"

I sighed and shook my head.

"Besides," mused Auntie, "he *is* sich a 'andsome little feller. It's no good 'avin' another try for them trousers, I suppose?"

"No good at all," I assured her. "You

must be content with the riding-breeches and the Newmarket coat."

"Well, well," responded Auntie, with complacency, "per'aps I must. My little man won't 'arf cut a dash at the slate club! I will say 'Good arternoon, young feller.'"

"Good afternoon," I repeated as Auntie took up the handles of her barrow. Then—an afterthought—I added: "And Votes for Women!"

"What's that?" demanded Auntie, dropping the handles quickly.

"Votes for Women!" I repeated.

"No you don't," said Auntie.

"But I do," I protested. "Why not?"

"Why not?" echoed Auntie. "I'll tell you why not. Them screechin' suffergettes is a disgrace. They oughter git a smack be'ind the ear; that's what *they* oughter git. Settin' theirselves up to be as good as men. Why don't they sit atome and mind the 'ouse?"

"They haven't all got model husbands," I submitted.

"Then why don't they look arter 'em better?" inquired Auntie.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"If all their 'usbands was as good as mine

—ser nicely be'aved ; the same fine 'air and teeth—it would on'y be wasted on 'em. Parcel of screechin' parrots. Y'oughter 'ear my little bloke's opinion of 'em ! My Gawd, 'e don't 'arf weigh them up." Auntie spat.

And Auntie rubbed her hands and again took up the handles of her barrow.

I watched her push it up the road ; the road which led to London and the hair and teeth.

XXXVI

THE LITTLE HARE

“OH! pray, yes! Aht be the best day’s honest poachin’ ever oi done—aht be. Oi took a proide in ut, too, seein’ as oi be warkin’ for a magistrate. We was partners, as you *moight* say.”

Old Uncle Gorman—“Peeper” Gorman he is called by his cronies—lay back in the chimney seat of The Buckinghamshire Yeoman, and sucked at his pipe, and chuckled, and wagged his head, and winked. It was evident that his thoughts afforded him satisfaction.

“Partners with a magistrate!” exclaimed your servant. “That’s unusual, isn’t it, Peeper?”

“*Unusual?*” queried Peeper. “You could call it mirakerlous—an’ *then* be modest. I ain’t ’eerd o’ never another case—eether before nor sense. Unusual! Aht be a pore name to give to a ’sperience loike thaht theer.”

“That,” I responded, “is undoubtedly the

case. I should have chosen a more suitable word."

"Aht's what oi mean," said Peeper.

"The proper word," I continued abjectly, "is unique. That experience of yours, Peeper, is unique. I should *so* much like to hear about it."

"Goo'lung with you. Ain't oi be set yare all's airternoon a-tallin' you o' moi 'speriences? Oi be thaht 'usky et'll take a full month ever oi be fit to sing in the choir agen."

This observation was uttered with irony. Mr. Gorman does not possess a devotional temperament. His only recorded visit to a place of worship took place a great many years ago, and even that visit had a purely secular motive, being occasioned by Mr. Gorman's interest in the subject of ancient leaden roofings.

"Oi be *uncommon* 'usky!" murmured Mr. Gorman.

"I can offer you—a—a—cough lozenge!" suggested your servant.

"Goo 'lung with you," said Mr. Gorman.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "a—a glass of——"

"Moin's a quart," said Mr. Gorman.

"An' as for thaht le'l 'sperience o' moine,"

he continued, without further hesitancy, "aht come to pass alung o' me bein' unfortinet. You 'eerd tell, oi dessay, of a red-bearded (alliteration) be name o' Mullinger—'im as is 'ead keeper oover at the 'All. A clumsy, 'Ahmpsheer-born love-child 'e be, as racken 'e've larnt the way to rare pheasants. Rare pheasants, indeed !

"Oi racken as le'l Petterling Woods don't show *yairf* the sport to-day nor what they done in oold Alf Lubin's toime. An' not near so many on us shootin' oover 'em—not be *yairf*.

"Oold Lubin 'e *could* rare pheasants, 'e could. Oi knowed the toime, I 'ave, when me an' the Squoire alone would knock oover as many birds in one day and one noight as what the 'ole company of us can bring away in a season nowadays. Rare pheasants, indeed ! The red-bearded oold ape !

"This chap Mullinger an' me, we 'appened to run acrost each other in the woods one noight—that bein' the misfortune what oi spoke of. Moi oold mother, she never give birth to no donkeys, ever *oi* 'eerd on : so when that red-bearded oold nanny-goat come stumblin' a-top o' me—me loiin' still, same's ef oi be some oold theng as belong theer—oi

never made no argeement, nor oi never showed no foight. Aht be foolishness, aht be. When you be cotched, you be cotched, an' attempted manslaughter ain't gointer ease yere conscience for ye : nor it don't amuse the Bench.

“ ‘What's all this ?’ says oold Mullinger, as he falls a-top o' me. ‘Sim to me,’ says oi, ‘as it be some red-bearded oold duffer as can't oold 'is liquor.’ ‘An' what be *thaht* ?’ says 'e, pookin' around wi' 'is steck. ‘Aht be a 'are,’ oi say. Says oold Mullinger : ‘Oi see what it *be* all roight, moi mahn. What I meanter say is, 'Ow come it yeer ?’

“ ‘Do ye want the truth ?’ says oi.

“ ‘Aye,’ says 'e, ‘an' dahm quick.’

“ ‘Mr. Mullinger, sir,’ oi says, ‘I reckons to be a plain mahn. An' what oi says is this : We be all yeer—three on us : you, me, an' a oold dead 'are. See ?’

“ ‘See *what* ?’ says Gingerface.

“ ‘So oi says it oover agen, 'e bein' a pore, simple-minded beggar, an' 'Ahmpsheer born to boot. ‘We be all yeer,’ oi say, ‘an' th' oold 'are be dead.’

“ ‘Meanin' what ?’ says the poor oold lady.

“ ‘Meanin',’ oi says, ‘as we be all yeer—includin' of a 'are,’ oi say, ‘which be dead.’

“ A grin come oover 'is oold face, what looked a'most whoite in the moonloight. ' Oi take it, then,' says 'e, ' as you owns up ? ’

“ ‘ You can take it,' says oi, ' as we be arl yeer. An' the poor oold 'are be dead. Which of us be gointer 'ave 'er—you or me ? ’

“ ‘ Aht be moi master's property,' says 'e. ' You leave it wheer it lay.' ”

“ ‘ Then oi'll thank you fur the loan o' yewer tobacco-pouch,' oi say. An' wi' thaht oi loights up, an' oi pats 'is pore oold 'ead's koin'd as a cushion, an' we walks away together, closer an' sweeter nor sweet'earts. There be no 'arm in oold Mullinger. 'E be just *simple*.

“ So next coort-day I otchles up to Petterling, an' claims me twenty-third conviction. Twenty shillin' an' costs was the understandin' what we come to. An' oold Squoire Pilcher, from Red Cap Grange, oover beyond the valley theer, 'e gimme the Word of our Lord in seventeen chapters an' a psalm.

“ ‘ 'E be dead now, oold Pilcher, an' not before 'is toime. A uglier, queesier, nosier, cacklin' oold son of a lady never you saw—all wind an' sniffle. Reckoned 'isself to be a botanist or that—for ever 'sperimentin' wi'

skins an' skeletons or such-like. Kep' a museum up at the Grange, wi' loive bats in ut, an' stoats an' weasels, an' all manner of ugly stinkin' tackle loike thaht theer. An' 'e reckoned 'isself to be Deputy-Lootinant for the county, an' Senior Magistrate, an' Professor o' Science, an' God Awmoighty, an' what not.

"An' 'e gimme the Word o' God for seven rosy minutes be the clock. An' when 'e done wi' me, oi steps down nippy, an' pays me money to the Clurk. An' when oi be payin' of it, the Clurk 'e say to me, says 'e :

" 'Mr. Pilcher,' says 'e, 'would wish you to stop be'ind,' says 'e, 'an' see 'im proivit,' 'e say, 'on a matter o' business.'

"So oi goes away to the 'inder end o' the Coort'ouse, an' theer oi sit, alung of a pocketful o' filberts, till so lung as oold Pilcher be ready for 'is proivut bisnuss.

"An' when the Coort was rose, oold Pilcher 'e roises also, and ootchles oover to moi carner.

" 'Gorman,' says 'e, very brisk an' masterful, 'oi want a 'are—a loive 'are—to do moi botany on,' says 'e.

" 'Yessir,' says oi.

" 'Can you foind me one ?' says 'e.

"Oi looks at the ugly oold idiot very

straight an' very simple. 'Oi dessay as oi could *buy* you one,' says oi.

" 'To-day?' 'e asks.

" 'Oi dunno 'bout to-day,' oi answers, 'cos two can play at childishness, just's easy as one. 'They be rare uncommon animals,' says oi. 'Maybe there won't be one for sale just yit awhoile,' says oi. 'An' oi gutter goo a lungish journey,' says oi, ''fore I can make sure o' buyin' any.'

" 'Ow much will it cost?' say Squire Pilcher.

" 'Oi done a little 'rithmetic in moi yead. 'Two pun or theerabouts,' says oi.

" 'Dear me! Dear me! *Dear me!*' says the soft-'eaded oold genelman. 'That's *very* expensive, Gorman.'

" 'Oi've 'ad a expensive day, sir,' says oi, lookin' at 'im more simple an' respectful nor ever.

" 'Well, well,' says 'e, 'bring your 'are along, an' we'll see what can be done.' "

"That is all the story," said Peeper Gorman simply, as he drained his glass. "Oi went snacks with a magistrate, you see, same's oi toold you. It weer a pleasant 'sperience."

I beckoned to the landlord, and Peeper Gorman's beer-mug was replenished.

"Is that *quite* all, Peeper?" I then inquired. "Have you told me everything? Did old Pilcher get his hare?"

Mr. Gorman chuckled. "He got it roight enough!" said he. "An' yet—in a manner o' speakin'—he *never* got it. Thaht weer a rum stairt."

"How——?"

"The oold 'are come off *his* land, do you see?" Mr. Gorman was kind enough to explain. "Oi caught 'im comfortable, 'cos it be quite a comfortable game, 'are-catchin'—to them as know it. An' oi puts oold pussy in a le'l sack, an' otchles orf a matter o' three 'under' yairds to the front door o' the Grange. An' there I airsts to see oold Pilcher.

"I shoos 'im the 'are, arl toidy in 'e's le'l bag.

" 'What do I pay you?' says the Squoire. An' I toold 'im same's oi toold 'im afore— 'Two pun ten!' oi say.

" 'Well, well!' says 'e, an' 'ands the money oover, sad an' sorrerful.

"Then I 'and 'im the bag, an' 'e opens the top of it. An' out jumps pussy.

" 'Begad,' says 'e, 'the 'are as run away!'

'e say,—very insulted, same's you might expect of a gentleman in 'is position. ' What shall I do ? ' says 'e.

“ ‘ *Do ?* ’ oi say, ‘ *do ?* ’ Whoi, Squire,’ says oi, ‘ you take an’ do the same’s oi done : *you run airter it !* ’ ”

XXXVII

PEPPER'S COURTSHIP

MR. WILL PEPPER, the carrier, came to my door this morning with an air of repentance and a parcel of books.

The books were three days late.

I looked at Mr. Pepper and Mr. Pepper looked at the ground.

"'Tis fine growing weather, sir," said Mr. Pepper, at last, breaking what to him was evidently a painful silence.

"It is deuced bad carrying weather," I retorted.

"Beg yere pardon, sir," said Mr. Pepper, "but—to tell ye the honest truth, sir, I be late along o' this yere quarter-day. 'Tis a turble busy season, is quarter-day."

"Pepper," I said, "you have been to London to draw your army pension."

Pepper hung his head.

"Pepper," I said, "how dare you!"

Pepper touched his cap.

"Pepper," I repeated, "how dare you go to London and spend your own money on beer!"

"If you please, sir," said Pepper, "'tis a turble 'ard life. Out in all weathers, sir."

"But, dash it all, Pepper," I retorted, "my books are three days late."

"Sir," said Mr. Pepper, with an unmistakable groan of remorse, "I ax your pardon."

"And then again, Pepper," I felt it my duty to point out, "there is the wastefulness of your conduct to be considered. Thirteen weeks' stipend, the free and almost unconditional offering of a grateful country, spent in a flash—on beer!"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," murmured Mr. Pepper, pawing the gravel uneasily, "'tweer not so much a matter o' beer this journey. 'Tweer more in the nature of a young lady, sir."

"This," I felt forced to declare, "is even worse, Pepper: this is very nearly scandalous."

"Sir," repeated Mr. Pepper, "I ax your pardon."

"And if I grant it, Pepper, will you promise to leave off wearing that spotty tie?"

"Sir," said Mr. Pepper, "I will—with a grateful 'eart."

"Then, Pepper, old friend," I responded, "here is my hand. We will dismiss the subject from our thoughts. We will forget it. We will let bygones be bygones. We will direct our gaze towards the rosy future. We will comport ourselves as though the past had never been.

"Shake hands, my Pepper : seal thus all our vows :
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former thoughts retain."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Pepper.

"Tie up your reins, now, Pepper," I said, "and tell me all the news. How was London looking ? Did you meet with any more pick-pockets ?"

Mr. Pepper solemnly shook his head. "I was too pure sober this journey," he explained. "'Tis not your sober sort as they folk want to meddle with. But one thing I did meet, sir, and that was a most queer young lady. A most extra-*ornarary* queer young lady."

"She to whom you have already referred ?" I suggested.

"'Er what I spook of," assented Mr. Pepper.

"I seed 'er first," continued the carrier,

“on 'Ampstead Common, or the 'Eath, as they calls it. I was gone theer to look if theer was e'er a donkey to be found, for I got a fancy for to run one in my li'l 'ay cart. And a bloke what I seed in a public-'ouse, 'e tal me to goo seek on 'Ampstead Common if 'tis donkeys oi be lookin' for. I seed a tidy few, too ; but they was all in the jobbin' line, an' not for sale. And I seed this 'ere young lady—'er what I spoke of, as seem to act so queer.

“She weer a innercent young thing, and pratty to look at, and was sot upon 'er knees a-scruffling up the dirt and lookin' sorry. I touches 'er upon the shoulder and I rises my 'at and I say :

“ ‘Be you lookin' for a umbreller 'andil, miss ?’

“ ‘That's right,' says she.

“ ‘Then I got ut yere,' I say : for I'd picked it up near by. The young woman, she look at me lamb-like, and before I knowed 'ow, she and me, we was a-riding together on the same swiss-back and gooun ups-a-diddy in the swing-boats and shootin' at Aunt Salley and throwing the mallet and eatin' 'okey and lookin' at the living pictures. They got it all there on this 'Ampstead

Common—all day long, as large as life. Which, from first to last, it cost me fifteen shillun'. A innercent young woman, nor one more pratty to look at I never did see. But she acted extraornarary queer."

"Seems sane enough so far," I commented.

"By all means," assented Mr. Pepper, looking at me doubtfully. "When 'twas time for 'er to goo, I offered for to see 'er 'ome—she bein' so innercent and pratty. But she tal me that will never do.

" 'Then tal me where you live,' I say, 'so's I kin come along s'mother time.'

" ' 'Tis a good lung way from yere,' she say.

"I tal 'er that don't make no odds, 'cos I be come to London for to drar my pension."

" 'You goo from yere to 'Ighgate Ponds,' she say, 'and look for a yaller 'bus.'

" 'Yes,' I say.

" 'And then,' say she, 'you goo upon this yaller 'bus till it stop at a public called the Mohawk.'

" 'Yes,' I say.

" 'And there,' she say, 'you'll find a white tram what'll take you to a place called Battle Bridge.'

“ ‘ Righto,’ I say.

“ ‘ There’ll be a policeman at the bridge, and you must ask ’im to show you the way to King’s Cross Station. When you get to King’s Cross Station, nip on to a orange-coloured ’bus, what’ll take you to the Angel underground electric.’

“ ‘ Very good,’ I say.

“ ‘ You take a ticket at the Angel underground electric,’ the young lady tal me, ‘ so far as London Bridge. When you get out at London Bridge, ’op on to a ’bus—a green ’bus—what’ll take you to Moneymment Station. Take a ticket from Moneymment Station so fur as Mile End Road, and when you get out at Mile End Road ask some person to show you the way to Bow Bridge. See?’ ask the young lady.

“ ‘ ’Tis all quite plain, I thank ye, miss,’ says I.

“ ‘ Well, then,’ she say, ‘ at Bow Bridge you look for a tram to Stepney Green, and when you git there git out. Git out close to the church and ask for a street called Pike Street, and the third on the left is Green Street, and there bean’t on’y one street orf that, and that’s Burbidge Street ; and number ten is where I live. Good arternoon, young man.’

“ ‘ Good arternoon to *you*, miss,’ says I. ‘ And thank ye for yere kind directions.’ ”

At this stage of his narrative Mr. Pepper lapsed into speculative silence. But presently, breathing hard and gazing fixedly at his boots, he resumed it.

“ I done as the lady tal me,” said Mr. Pepper. “ I started off next mornin’, that bein’ Sunday, and me in London fur to drar my pension and not carin’ how much I spend or what become of me.

“ I follered the rules exac’yly. Same as she tal me, so I done, and it must ’a took me a matter o’ fower howers. First I started orf from Camden Town, from the ’ouse where I lodged, to ’Ampstead Common, so’s to make sure o’ my bearings. Then I ax me way from theer to ’Ighgate Ponds. Then I gits upon a yaller ’bus and goo to the Mohawk, and from theer I goos upon the tram to Battle Bridge, and I walks from Battle Bridge to King’s Cross Station and gits a ’bus up to the Angel Station, and rides upon the train to London Bridge, and walks from London Bridge to Moneymment, and from Moneymment I rides to Mile End Road ; and when I gets out I gives a penny to a li’l lad and he show me the way to the bridge, and

I git upon a tram and rides to Stepney Church, and find the street called Pike Street and another street called Green Street, and the on'y one orf that was Burbidge Street ; and theer at number ten, be'ind a li'l dirty gate, stood my young lady sure enough. And there was a ugly young bloke beside of 'er."

Mr. Pepper again lapsed into silence. And again, after swallowing many invisible lumps which seemed to be inconveniencing his throat, he resumed the narrative.

"Direckly my young lady see me," said Mr. Pepper, "she began for to laugh and sniggle, which I do not wonder at, me bein' that red and sticky with the perspersweats. For the journey, that had took me fower hower or more, and 'twas a close mornin'. An' the young lady, she take the arm of the ugly li'l bleater as stand beside 'er, and she say to me, she say :

" 'I be sorry as you come so far, for I be busy.'

" 'Simmingly,' says I.

" 'Your best way back,' says she, 'is to git a tram from Stepney Green to Bow Bridge. Arst the way from theer to Mile End Road and goo into the station and git a train to Moneymment. Walk from Moneymment to Lon-

don Bridge, and take a ticket straight through to the Angel. From the Angel you kin goo be 'bus to King's Cross, and you kin walk from King's Cross to Battle Bridge and git a tram to the Mohawk, and a yaller 'bus what stops outside will take you all the way to 'Ighgit Ponds ; and 'tis a pleasant walk from 'Ighgit Ponds to 'Ampstead 'Eath. And——'

" 'I kin manage the rest meself, miss, thank you,' says I. And I rises me 'at and come away.

" I found me way to Stepney Green, and got upon the tram what took me to Bow Bridge, and—— "

" So resumed your journey back to Hampstead," I interpolated. " It was a strange adventure, Pepper."

" Strange is the word," assented Mr. Pepper. " And that was a extraornarary strange young lady. So pratty to look at, too.

" It took me more'n five hower or ever I git back to Camden Town. 'Tis a long step to your sweet'eart—in London."

XXXVIII

THE EVANGELIST

"I THINK, sir," said the landlord of the Bristow Arms, at Blowfield, "that you would very likely sit more comfortable in the *little* parlour. The, ah, domestics are spring-cleaning here. There is a comfortable hottoman in the Little Parlour, sir."

I bowed to the landlord, who bowed to me and then, with a solemn and heraldic air, conducted me to the Little Parlour, bearing my glass before him on a purple cushion. At least, I think it was a purple cushion.

There was a person in the little parlour ; a person and some people. The person wore a velvet jacket and long dark hair. He was sipping gin from a long-stemmed glass which he held in a manner that showed him to be conscious of his slender fingers. The people wore leggings and carried toothpicks and drank beer.

Addressing himself to the stoutest and most grave of the people, the Person spoke as follows :

“What I mean to say, sir, is this : The mistake which people make is in regarding Christ as an Individual and not as an Idea. He is the personification of all good impulses ; He is goodness. When, therefore, I tell you that worrying mother otters with dogs and sticks is——”

“You give us that before, sir,” said the gravest of the people.

“Then I need not repeat it,” assented the Person. “I wished merely to illustrate my argument. I say that human nature at its best is Christ. I say that Christ is in all of us when we act worthily or proclaim true things. I am at present drinking gin, sir ; you are drinking beer. These actions are eminently Christian, for they are the reverent accompaniment to our entirely reverent discourse——”

“Reverent is *good*,” said one of the people, spitting into the fire-place.

“But,” continued the Person, ignoring this commentator, “we do wrong when we drink ourselves purple, because in that condition we go out and worry otters. Now——”

“But what’s the *’arm* in otter-’unting ?” demanded the gravest of the people. “There’s nothing said against it in the Bible.”

"Sir," said the Person, "there is everything said against it in the Bible."

"Wheer?" demanded the grave one.

"It is opposed to the whole spirit of Christian teaching," said the other.

"I knowed you couldn't show me wheer!" said the grave one.

"That is my whole point," cried the Person. "You are always thinking about words and sentences and individuals. I tell you to look at the spirit of the thing. I tell you——"

A gentleman at the far end of the room took out his pipe and pointed it square at the evangelist. "Who the 'ell are *you* to tell us anything?" he demanded.

"I am named Hodges," said the Person, "and I live by painting pictures. The gentleman with the straw in his mouth asked me to explain how I could call myself a Christian when I played the flute on Sundays. I am endeavouring to explain."

"My name," said the interrupter, "is Pyke, and I sell corn. The Bible is good enough for me. I go to church, I do, when I want to be corrected. I can get it there from a proper professional gentleman."

"It is the professional gentleman whom I

complain of," said the Person. "He fills our heads with words. He——"

"You'll pardon *me*, sir," said a new voice, a senatorial, fruity voice, which I discovered to be that of the landlord—"you'll pardon *me*, sir, but I cannot allow any abuse of our Vicar to go on in *this* 'ouse."

"But——" began the Person, when our host interrupted him.

"We won't argue," he said. "Let it drop. This is a properly conducted 'ouse. Let it drop."

"According to you, then," said the gravest of the people, sipping his beer deliberately, "we ain't none of us Christians—only you."

"On the contrary," replied the Person, "I say that we are all Christians—even the wickedest and dirtiest of us. I say that we must be so, because we were born with impulses, and all of those impulses which are not bestial are necessarily Christian—are Christ, in fact."

"Really, sir," said the landlord, "I must ask you to be careful of your language."

"I assure you," answered the Person, "that I always select my language with the utmost care. Really, now, the position which I take up in this matter is not at all extreme."

I merely say that Christ is in all of us. When I lie or kill, I am a human being : when I play games with little children I am Christ."

"You are *what*?" inquired the gravest of the people, rising slowly to his feet.

"Christ," repeated the Person meekly.

There was an awful silence, broken at last by the landlord.

"Young man," he said, "I must ask you to leave this house. You will get it a bad name."

The young man evidently wished to argue, but he was silenced and eliminated by the outraged people.

We were all severely shaken by the incident and had to drink more beer.

We excommunicated all strangers and passed a vote of horror on this one, unanimous save for one dissentient voice. The dissenter said :

"I can on'y tell you, gentlemen, as 'e paid up right enough for the coal what 'e 'ad off me."

XXXIX

MR. TRACEY'S ADIEU!

MR. TRACEY, prince of jobbing gardeners, has left these haunts for ever.

He came here yesterday in the butcher's cart and a state of intoxication, it being then, so near as I can reckon, twelve o'clock. He came, and offered insults to my Mrs. Pett. He winked, as I am told, at Mrs. Pett. He then walked forth, and titubanted reverently round and round the parsley, chives, and chervil for several minutes, after which, becoming dizzy, he staggered to the tool-shed, where I found him later, slumbering peacefully with his head on the lawn-mower.

Having regard to the present preposterous and Socialistic state of the law affecting employers' liability, we loosened the accomplished gentleman's neckband, removed a scythe from the vicinity of his left cheek, and left him thus to undisturbed siesta.

Pleased as we were to offer hospitality to our Mr. Tracey, his advent nevertheless surprised us ; for Mr. Tracey had been here only the morning before, when he had put in a very

hard and conscientious day's work, leaving us at sundown, and leaving the garden more spick, more span, more neatly mowed and featly hoed than he has left it "for monce and monce and monce"—if I may quote a poet of the people.

When the church clock struck four Mr. Tracey rose up from his couch and shook himself. Then, seizing his pillow by its handle and still affecting a rather titubantic gait, Mr. Tracey solemnly pushed that implement round and about the closely shaven lawn.

After proceeding thus for some minutes without interruption, Mr. Tracey suddenly stood still and caused the mowing-machine to do likewise. Then, in a loud voice, he made the following remarks

"Hoy! Hoy!"

We flew on wings of haste to Mr. Tracey's side. "Are ye got a hile-can?" said Mr. Tracey.

We said, "For what purpose do you want an oil-can?"

"To hile this here," responded Mr. Tracey. "'Tis a ramshackle old set-out."

"You chose it, anyhow, Mr. Tracey," we ventured to submit. "It was a very costly set-out."

"They don't make mowers these days—not to say mowers. This here be fair wore out. Fetch me a hile-can."

"But," we ventured to point out, "the thing is dripping with oil already."

"Yes," assented Mr. Tracey, "'tis a ramshackle ole affair. Fetch me a hile-can."

"You don't want an oil-can," we insisted.

"And I tal *you*," insisted Mr. Tracey, "that this here set-out bean't no good without one. Look at the grass, then! It don't so much as *shape* to cut the blessed grass."

"But don't you see," we patiently explained, "that there isn't any grass to cut? You cut it all last night."

Mr. Tracey opened his mouth and looked at me thoughtfully, silently; then he looked at the grass and at the mowing-machine. Last of all he put his hand in his pocket and produced a richly buttered note-book, and looked at that.

"Begod—you're right!" said Mr. Tracey quietly, having manipulated this record with both thumbs.

Without offering any further comment he gathered up the mowing-machine and took it back to his boudoir. He then returned, in company with an aphis-brush, and lunged

emphatically at the rose trees for nearly two hours, at the end of which period he presented himself at the back door and demanded a day's wages. We replied that we had paid him yesterday.

He opened his mouth and looked at us. He also fumbled for the butter-book and thumbed it as before.

"Begod!" said Mr. Tracey, for the second time—"you're right."

He then sat down on the well-curb and filled his pipe. Having smoked it in profound silence, working his fingers in a strange manner and watching them intently as he did so, he again stood up and uttered a further remark:

"Hoy!" said Mr. Tracey.

We joined him at the well-head. "Yes?" we inquired politely.

"I be gointer give you notice," said Mr. Tracey. "I bean't a-gointer work yere any longer."

"Why?" we asked.

"I be sick of the place," rejoined our henchman. "No 'arm done or said, but I be fair sick of it all."

"Anything to do with our little argument about the beans?" we inquired. "Because

really, you know, Mr. Tracey—no harm done or said—it would be foolish of you to take offence at my having an individual taste in vegetables.”

“ ‘Taste’ is good,” reflected Mr. Tracey. “But that don’t worry me, whatever sort of trash you be minded to grow.”

“Is it because I insisted on having those roses moved? Really they were doing no good at all in the old place.”

“They roses,” asserted Mr. Tracey hotly, “was well enough where they stood. On’y a old woman or a old fool would set out to grow they sorts on a raised border, and so I told you at the time.”

“You certainly offered a sort of protest,” we agreed. “But was my conduct bad enough to justify you in parting from me for ever?”

“As for yere foolish, soft ways,” said Mr. Tracey, “I don’t attach naarthun of importance to *them*. Grow yere roses in the dick (ditch) if you want to. That don’t trouble *me* naarthun.”

“Is the—are you perhaps dissatisfied with your—with the financial aspect of our partnership?”

“I aren’t got no complaint about that,”

said Mr. Tracey. "You don't pay more'n you need, but you pay it reg'lar."

"Then why on earth are you leaving?"

"No 'arm done or meant," responded Mr. Tracey, "but I'd as soon I didn't say."

"But you must give a reason," we urged.

"You won't blame me, then, if the reason don't please you when you get it?" inquired Mr. Tracey.

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, young man," said Mr. Tracey, "'tis like this here: I worked here, on and orf, for three year now, and—and I be fair sick of you. No 'arm said or meant, but I be fair sick of the sight of you—you and your damned nonsense and yere stoopid face!"

XL

MY LADY'S CHARIOT

I MET it, first of all, on the sun-baked slopes of our local Everest, which is called Chalk Hill, and which is well called, being composed entirely of large white holes which are separated, one from the other, by small, lop-sided, melancholy specimens of the ever-grey juniper shrub. It was a two-wheeled chariot, constructed chiefly of old chicken-cooping and propelled on the primogenial or push system.

He who pushed it was a native-born man named Pontefract: a hay-coloured, overgrown fellow, of respectful habits, whom the people of this neighbourhood call Jack o' Clubs. He is, by public profession, a buyer and vendor of rabbit-skins, but he really lives by his wits—a method of living which is practised by hardly anybody in Sussex. Therefore they despise him and call him Jack o' Clubs. He steals old iron from their dust-heaps every evening, and sells it to them, newly burnished, every morning. Also, he sells to me at extremely reasonable prices teal and woodcock, which are specially raised

for him by Major-General Tinker, of Bishops Bury Hall.

The chariot, when I met it on the wind-smitten slopes of our local Everest, contained much that properly pertains to the midnight dust-bin. Also, it contained a full-grown girl. She lay in a sort of hollow amid the sardine-tins and kettle-spouts and furs and spices, with her shamefully public legs dependent from the dash-board—or, rather, from that part of the chariot which presented an acceptable site for a dash-board. She had small eyes, crimped hair, red lips, a smut on each cheek, and an expression of quiet happiness. When Jack o' Clubs pulled up the chariot her head rolled here and there amid the furs and tins and spices.

“ Good marnin' to *you*, sir ! ” shouted Jack o' Clubs. “ Can I sell you a very curious l'el old iron hook, sir ? 'Tis a very curious, antikew l'el piece. 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a beauty.”

I did not want an iron hook. Nor did I want a spoutless teapot, a second-hand dog-collar, a leaden clock-weight, a broken garden ornament, or a bag of stolen golf-balls.

“ Then what about this here ole-fashioned l'el bread-pan, me gentleman ? ” persisted

Jack o' Clubs, holding up an ill-shaped bowl of brown earthenware. "'Pon me word, 'tis a splendid thing : one o' the old sort. Do to bake *anything* in. I on'y want a shillin' for it. 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a bargain."

"Your sister?" I inquired, smiling the bright smile of intelligent friendship at the lady in the chariot.

"My mate," responded Jack o' Clubs. "I fetched 'er from down below there. She belong to a reg'lar 'ard-working family, but I fetched 'er away. Shall we say a shillin'?"

I looked again at the lady in the chariot, who did not speak or move, but whose big red lips were parted in a smile, whose little eyes showed forth contentment. "Did you steal her?" I demanded. Jack o' Clubs said quietly :

"I fetched 'er away.

"And," he added, "seeun as there be two on us now, and 'tis so 'ard to make a livin', I'll say tenpence 'a'penny." Again he held up the little brown pot.

"Its value is tuppence," I informed him.

"Not to-day, sir," he answered gravely. . . . "The clay be got so dear. Shall we say fourpence, then, me gentleman? 'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a bargain."

“Where do you keep her?” I inquired.

“I got some l’el premises be’ind they furzes there,” said Jack o’ Clubs. “Would you care to look at a couple of very rare old anderions, me gentleman? ’Tis only a step to where I keep ’em. They be a wonderful uncommon l’el pair, ’pon me word, now, sir. Worked out in the shape o’ two young naked females, sir, which I’ll take me oath, young gentleman, if you wasn’t a bachelor, I dursn’t recommend them.”

I had seen some of Mr. Pontefract’s valuable antiques before that day, and therefore did not care a great deal whether I saw the shameless iron females or not; but I did want to see the little premises. So I permitted Mr. Pontefract and the chariot and the lady to head a procession round the chalk pits—which procession came to a sudden halt before a stretch of canvas which was spread upon sticks behind a gorse bush.

“This be our villa,” said Jack o’ Clubs. “And that,” he added, pointing in the direction of a powerful smell, “is where I keeps the surplus.”

Before I could ask him to refrain from disturbing the surplus, Jack o’ Clubs had ascended a precipitous monument of his

nightly labours, and had extracted therefrom the andirons. They were exceedingly old and beautiful andirons. "Where did you get them?" I inquired of Mr. Pontefract.

"I fetched 'em away, sir," said that gentleman. . . . "Six shillin'."

"Three," I replied. "Aren't you afraid that she'll catch cold or get fever up here on the hill-side?"

"Five, then," said Jack o' Clubs. "No fear. She be one o' the roving sort. That's why I fetched 'er away."

The girl sat up and threw a rabbit-skin at him. Then she lay back again among the tins—and smiled.

"These evening mists——?" I hinted: "the rain; this wet chalk; the—er—rigours of summer? Let's say three-and-six, then?"

"Four-and-six," said Jack o' Clubs. "We don't trouble naarthun, 'er and me. She be one o' the moonlight sort."

"So we struck it at Four" (with three-pence for the moonlight sort thrown in), and I said good-bye to them. Jack o' Clubs said "Good-bye," too, and the red lips widened lazily.

Now, we keep late lights in the cottage

where I live, and sometimes people come, when it is dark, and ask for straw and shelter. Being Christian folk, we often give them ha'pennies or cheese. I therefore was not surprised to hear a tapping at the gate two nights ago ; but I *was* surprised, on going to the gate, to find there—Jack o' Clubs, and the chariot, and the legs. But no red lips : no smiles.

" I brought you the l'el earthenware pan, sir," said Jack o' Clubs. "'Pon me word, sir, 'tis a wonnerful good l'el pan. I don't arst naarthun for it, sir—on'y—on'y——"

" Only what ? " I demanded.

" A l'el drop o' whiskey, sir, or gin, me gentleman, or wine. 'Pon me word, I wouldn't arst it, on'y . . . I think the chill 'ave took 'er. And now—this last minute—I think . . . I think . . . Begod, I dursn't look.

" You see, sir," said Jack o' Clubs, " I be carryin' 'er back again, carryin' 'er 'ome."

He peered at me with eyes from which the cunning had departed, and plucked at the rough sacking which covered her (all save the legs) like a pall.

XLI

THE KENTRY GAL

“FROM the kentry, I see, sir,” said the man with the toothpick, gazing intelligently at the dirt on my boots. “Grand place—the kentry.”

“I call him ‘The man with the toothpick,’ because our friendship, pleasant though it was, and charged with fragrant recollections, lasted for so brief a period that it afforded me no opportunity to pierce the mystery of his incognito.

He was a hearty, candid gentleman in a gold watch-chain and black whiskers. He had the figure and back of a respectable butler; but the diamondiferous ornaments which sparkled on his thick red fingers suggested that he followed some refined and profitable calling of a less subordinate character. He was my sole companion in a third-class railway-carriage, and he chatted continuously from Purley Oaks to London Bridge.

“I’ve often thought,” said the man with

the toothpick, "of takin' a ticket for the kentry one Saturday afternoon and 'avin' a look round—all on me own, as it were, with a bottle o' Bass and some sanwidges."

I treated this project to a few well-chosen words of encouragement, in which I dwelled particularly upon the stimulating qualities of country air in respect to thirst and appetite.

My companion nodded appreciatively. "But mind you," he explained, pointing the toothpick at me, "I don't want you to think that my idea in 'avin' a look round the kentry is simply to enjoy meself. Of course, I 'ope to git some pleasure out of it—what with the birds, and the blossoms, and the beer, and what not—but at the same time my main idea is *business*."

He put his head on one side, and closing one eye remained in that significant posture until I had nodded three times, when he resumed his explanations.

"When I say business," declared the man with the toothpick, "I ain't thinkin' so much of what a man might find in the way of money (though I daresay if a person was to keep their eyes open while taking in the beauty of it all there's many a good

order to be picked up from some of these 'ere wealthy squires), I ain't thinkin' so much of money, I say, as what I am of money's *worth*.

"To cut a long story short, young fellar, I got one of the best old women in England, and my idea in lookin' round the kentry is to find 'er a good, old-fashioned, kentry-bred slavey for a birthday present. Don't you think, young fellar, that if I was to make up me mind to it—take some beer and sanwidges with me, the same as I say, and make a reg'lar 'arf-day of it—I might very likely find the sort of gal I want?"

I thought that there was no limit to the possibilities of discovery open to a properly equipped and determined explorer.

"That's jest *my* idea," said the man with the toothpick. "What give me the notion was watchin' our next-door neighbours. *They* got a kentry gal: the real sort. They went as fur as Bromley, in Kent, to find 'er. Mrs. Gardiner—that's the name of our next-door neighbours; 'e's in the auctioneering—Mrs. Gardiner she tells my missus that *their* 'ome 'as bin a different place since they took to keepin' this kentry gal.

"My missus, she's a bit conservative, and

she's allus believed in sticking to the sort she's used to. But look at the result ! Six changes in nine months. As I tell 'er, it's more like a bookin'-orifice than a 'ome.

" Well, sir," pursued the man with the toothpick, " it's my idea to do the same as I say and give 'er a little surprise for 'er birthday. I *believe* in these kentry gals, I do, and so I'm gointer spend a 'ole 'alf-day, all be meself, with one bottle, and a packet, in the kentry, till I find 'er one.

" You wouldn't believe 'ow satisfactory that young woman is what our neighbours found at Bromley, in Kent.

" There's nine of 'em in family, countin' Mrs. Gardiner's mother and the twin-babies, and you wouldn't believe 'ow comfortable she makes 'em all.

" Nine in family is a different thing from two, the same as we are. It means nine pair of boots to be cleaned each morning for one thing. And yet if you was to look out of our landing window any morning at seven o'clock, there's the nine pair all right, shone up like mirrors and standin' in a row on their scullery step. She's never a minute later than seven o'clock in putting 'em there neether ; wet or shine, rain or snow, there

they are, all in a row, nine pairs on the scullery step.

“Then she’s ser good to the children. Washes ’em all, dresses ’em all, and gives ’em a bath each Wednesday.

“She’s a splendid cook, I ’ear, and she won’t ’ear of ’em buying no baker’s bread. She makes all their bread of a Wednesday and Saturday in a little oil-oven what they keep in the pantry. It’s not a small ’ouse—nine rooms and a lorft—but my ole woman she says that this ’ere kentry gal she keeps it all so clean that anybody might eat their dinner orf the floor.

“She’s a splendid gardener, too. The other mornin’ I ’appened to be up at five o’clock (we’d ’ad a bit of a dinner in connection with my mother lodge, and I’d missed a tram or two), and there she was in their backyard a-sowin’ beans and carrots in a ’ailstorm.

“She’s a pleasant, nice-spoken young woman, too. I ’elped ’er to carry some parcels up from the station the other night, and we ’ad a bit of a chat. It seems they’d give ’er a evenin’ orf (bein’ the third Saturday in the month) and she’d took a turn up Croydon market and bought a few toys for the children, and a tea-cosy for ’er missus,

and a pipe for the old man, and some fish for the Sunday dinner, and what not.

“Now that the weather’s turned a bit warmer we’ orfen see ’er out of a evenin’ between tea and supper time. She takes out the old lady—Mrs. Gardiner’s mother—in a Bath-chair.

“That’s why I say, sir,” added the man with the toothpick, “that it might pay a man, if ’e wanted to do a bit of a kindness to ’is old woman, to get a packet of sanwidges and a bottle one of these Saturdays and ’ave a serious look at the kentry. If on’y anybody could find ’em, there must be ’undreds of gals about like the one I speak of. Don’t you think a person could find one, sir, if they was to look about them in the proper spirit?”

“Why not?” I answered, as the train pulled up at London Bridge.

“Especially,” said the man with the toothpick, “if you was to offer a small wage—something quite nominal—just to tempt ’em. The young woman what I speak of she don’t get any wages at all, *yet*. She’s there as a sort of a pupil—to learn the Art.”

XLII

TWO OF A MOULD

A SORT of Uncle Podgers person came to my gate one morning. He was five feet and a few odd inches high, the same in girth, dressed all in shabby black, and wearing short side-whiskers and a clean linen hat. He looked like an undertaker's traveller. He breathed with difficulty. His movements were slow and detailed. He was an altogether hopeless case of middle age.

He hobbled up to the gate and leant upon it, heavily. He took off his damp hat and carefully rubbed the moisture into its lining with a large, red pocket-handkerchief. After some preparatory wheezes and a few false starts, he spoke.

"'Tis fair warm hot this arternoon, sir," he said.

I acquiesced.

"I be come," continued Uncle Podgers, "for to tidy you up, sir."

He had large, mournful eyes, and they seemed to be fixed in a deprecatory, hopeless manner upon my waistcoat. I hastily adjusted that garment; and Uncle Podgers,

realising that I had misunderstood his somewhat figurative turn of speech, quickly explained himself.

“In the nature of your hedges, sir; the grass banks and sich,” he explained.

“But,” I asked, “who ordered you? I am already supplied with all the jobbing gardeners that I require.”

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir,” responded Uncle Podgers, “’tis Mr. Tracey, your own reg’lar man, ’e ’ave sent me. Bein’ busy ’isself, sir; in the nature of a le’l contract job, sir, along of the Reverend Plummer, sir. ’Im bein’ axtry ornerary full o’ work, sir, ’e say to me as I should come an’ put you tidy, sir. Which I owns the name of Tidy, sir—George Tidy, beggin’ your pardon—Tidy be name and Tidy be nature.”

“Mr. Tidy,” I said, “it is unfortunate that you should have walked so far upon a fruitless errand, but the fact of the matter is that I cannot offer you any work. Mr. Tracey having failed, in the face of repeated promises, to put in an appearance, I have already engaged a young fellow to come and do his work.”

Mr. Tidy’s big, sad eyes grew bigger and sadder. It was some time before he spoke, and then he merely said: “And so you are

not got no work for me? Indeed . . . 'tis fair warm 'ot ! ”

“ I don't know when the young fellow will be here,” I stated, “ but—but I am expecting him.”

Mr. Tidy lifted up the hopeless eyes and struck me full in the chest with them. “ You bean't expectin' ne'er a young fellar,” he said.

“ That,” continued Mr. Tidy, “ be a little make-up what you've telled me outer kindness. I be too old an' slow an' rusted, on'y you be too pretty-mannered for to say so. I know, sir.”

“ It isn't that——” I began.

“ Aye, but 'tis,” interposed Mr. Tidy.

“ But it isn't ! ” I said.

“ But 'tis,” he repeated. . . . “ Phew ! But 'tis fair warm 'ot.”

“ 'Tis a arkid thing,” continued Mr. Tidy, “ livin' to be *my* age ; in specially when you runs to breath and fat, same's what I do. You will find that out yourself, sir, come to be fifty-four, the same as me. We be much of a mould, sir, you and me.”

“ Time I was your age, sir,” continued this fascinating talker, “ I earned good money. Gardener I was, in a genelman's fam'ly. I could move more lively then. I was a young

man much arter ye're own style to look at then, sir ; plain-featured and short—but sturdy. Pity but what I never larned to work with me 'ead, same's you do, sir."

"It's hot this afternoon," I said.

"'Tis fair *warm* 'ot," assented Mr. Tidy. "And yet," he mused, "I daresay but what the thoughts get slower come to my age, same as the limbs and breathin' does. If all what folks tell can be believed, sir, you be a sort of clurk ; you puts the black upon the white. Now tell me, sir, I wonder, sir, if when you come to my age, what with 'ard breathin', 'eavy foot, stiff jint, an' that, you will find your pen run easy ?"

I didn't know. I couldn't say. But I reflected that having that morning sold two pups to a fool, I could afford to do the ducal thing. I therefore said : "If two shillings would——"

Mr. Tidy interrupted me. "'Taint so much the money I value," he explained, "as the work. 'Tis the principle of the thing I look at."

"Exactly so," was my response. "And I was about to state that I happen to require, for the garden, a couple of shillingworth of road-grit. Now——"

Mr. Tidy again interrupted me. "When I be your age, sir, 'twas little I thought as ever I should come to sweepin' roads. And me took prizes be the score at rose shows ! But thanking you kindly, sir, I will do the work and grateful."

I jingled his florin in my pocket—my ducal pocket—as I watched him, slowly and with many puffs and wheezes, divest himself of coat and waistcoat. Then, with infinite labour, he raked up a little road-grit and then a little more road-grit, and then a little more road-grit. By tremendous effort he got the three little heaps together, and straightening his back, he produced, with a triumphant flourish, the red handkerchief, saying : "'Tis fair warm 'ot this arternoon."

I thought of myself at his age. I *saw* myself at his age—raking dirt in the same elaborate manner ; getting together "news-pars" for some daily rag. And then the horrible thought arose within me that even this employment would probably fail me. They like you to "move" in—in Tallis Street.

I jingled his florin again and was glad that I had done the ducal thing.

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